

Our Time



A LAST WORD ON WAR BOOKS

by Jack Beeching

COMMENTS ON A PEOPLE'S CULTURE

by E. P. Thompson

ART AND COAL

by Gadfan Morris

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Films, Books and Ourselves

TWO ASPECTS OF THE CRISIS HAVE A particular relevance for *Our Time*: the 75 per cent. duty on foreign films and the announcement made on September 12 (but still the subject of negotiation) on restrictions of imports of books and music.

They are related aspects insofar as both are meant to save foreign currency; from another point of view they are sharply contrasted. To the public at large Dr. Dalton's film import duty sounded like a declaration of independence. Film-makers and exhibitors were dismayed, or at least some of them were, for reasons that will be touched on in a moment. The public felt differently, and when the Gallup Poll asked a question whether the 75 per cent. duty should be retained even if it meant the Hollywood ban on all films for Britain would continue, a majority of replies said "Yes, keep the duty whatever Hollywood's reprisals."

There are lessons to be learned both inside and outside the studios. Public reaction was a vote of confidence in British films and of censure on Holly-

wood films. Perhaps it meant more: perhaps it meant even more than the simple delight of seeing Britain stand up for herself whether in films or in anything else: certainly it marks a healthy impatience with the phoney internationalism of Hollywood.

True, inside the industry, the picture looked anything but simple. Exhibitors, seeing a threat to profits, set up a howl. Tom O'Brien, M.P., is quoted as saying, "The complete close-down of the industry by Christmas is a mathematical certainty." In fact since film imports were up in the first six months of this year there is no likelihood of a shortage even of Hollywood films for something like nine months.

Paradoxically the deepest fears were among certain British film producers. The policy of the past few years to drive for export of British films, particularly to U.S., has meant more and more expensive films with less and less chance of recovering production costs in the home market. A reversal of this policy entails a reorganisation so drastic that there is

a real danger of a steep fall in production for several months while the reorganisation is carried through. Yet the majority in the Gallup Poll was right. The challenge is inspiring. It is only too easy to forget what happened three and four years ago. The foundation of a new British film industry was laid in the war years when films such as *Millions Like Us*, *The True Glory*, *The Way Ahead*, *Western Approaches*, *World of Plenty* gave hope and confidence because of their deep care for social truth, and because their values were not money values but native and human values. The true internationalism, the true humanism, is the sum of such native values, and to this conception the phoney internationalism of Hollywood has been a threat for a generation. In the past year or so we have slipped into imitating phoney internationalism. We can no more make films mainly for export than we can write books or compose symphonies for export only. Can we regain the earlier and sturdier mood? It's that or nothing. and, yes, we can regain it.

But this sturdiness is not the same thing as rigging an iron curtain round these islands, and the limitation of imports of books and music looks dangerously like something of the kind. Restriction, certainly, there will have to be. American or any other publishers who dump mass-produced rubbish on bookstalls and bookshops should indeed be discriminated against. There will have to be control of the printing of English books abroad. Publishers who dodge restrictions here by having their printing done in Europe might end by making planned production look an ass, and planned production there will have to be, in printing as in other industries. This in its turn involves issues the Government have shown no sign of recognising, and present regulations seem framed to hit the student or the musician while almost encouraging the rogue publisher.

During the fuel crisis one of the earliest victims was the Third Programme. It seemed to symbolise an attitude: *Cut culture first!* The form the Government have chosen for restricting book imports is in the same bad tradition.

The tradition *Our Time* stands for is the exact opposite. The present issue marks the beginning of a new series, fatter by eight pages, and priced at a shilling instead of sixpence. Here is a sign of the times if a small one. For we too believe in Britain standing up for herself and cultivating the sturdy mood; that care for native values is necessary to keep art and literature alive; and, more still, is what keeps a nation alive.



Miner

Em Brooks

Art and Coal

The Miner Comes To Town

by Gadfan Morris

IT WAS DURING THE DEBATE ON ONE OF the Coal Bills in the House of Commons some years back that George Lansbury rose to speak on the miners. Members had to run the risk of being called to order by the Chair on grounds of irrelevancy if miners were mentioned in discussions on coal in those days. But speak he did, and to illustrate one of his points, Mr. Lansbury held aloft a leather trace of the kind that was used by boys in the mines to pull, on their hands and knees, cartloads of coal from the face. That trace was the one my father had worn and, as far as I know, its dramatic appearance in the House established the first exhibition of the Miner Comes to Town.

He has come to town once or twice since then, either to sing for pennies in the street or to chain himself to the railings of Hyde Park as a protest against the State's indifference to his welfare. The State, however, was anything but a well-ordered one, and the chances of his case being taken up by it were as remote as his hopes of finding an impresario who would sponsor his singing. Consequently, he returned whence he had come a poorer man. The trouble was, of course, that nobody believed he bore on his stooping shoulders the whole economy of the country.

After a century of agitation, organisation and bitter struggles, in the course of which he endured every kind of indignity

in return for his efforts to secure some measure of justice for himself, a world war came along to help him in his struggle. The war was so ruthless in character that it devastated our ideas of government as much as it did our material resources, with the result that a revolution in our political adherences was inevitable. The mine owners were relieved of their properties in return for a very substantial sum by way of compensation, and the Government took over the mines. Its administrative prerogative was invested in a Coal Board over which, in order to reassure the world that no heads had rolled in the dust, an English peer was appointed to preside. After eight months of running the mines, the

Coal Board has brought the miner to London¹ to show all those who know little or nothing about him the way he goes about his business of mining coal. And what a grim business it is. . .

The advice given me by my father when I was a small boy was to keep as far away as I could from the sound of the pit hooter. Whatever it was I chose to do for my living it was bound to hold better prospects for me than coal-mining. Even today, when the miners' prospects are so much brighter than they were a few years ago, young men leave the villages where they were born to work at something other than mining. Although they have every reason to believe that the old conditions of distress and hopelessness will not occur again, they leave nevertheless because they think that a fuller and more incisive life can be lived the further they go from the coalfields. And in some ways they are right. Village life, however much its rural isolation may nourish the spirit by its natural beauty, contains an element that frustrates the intellectually curious mind. How much more frustrating it must be to live in a mining village whose landscapes are dominated all around by rubbish tips; whose topography is burdened by rows of grimy cottages so monotonous in appearance that it seems they were cut from the same template. It's small wonder that those who suffer these surroundings become rebels, whilst those whose temperaments cannot endure the boredom engendered by the social insularity of a community which works and lives within a small compass, turn their backs and leave. The way he lives is as responsible for implanting the rebellious spirit in the miner as how he lives.

How the miner lives, the pattern of his daily life, is something that did not really emerge from this Exhibition. His sense of loyalty and comradeship, his ethics and his politics all of which determine his stature, are treated in the Exhibition with modest euphemism. (The few wrinkles that we got, I cannot help suspecting, emanated from an Authoritative frown.) There is hardly any evidence to be found that the miner enjoys, or is capable of enjoying, any of the manifestations of creative art. Yet he has a capacity for them, as the players of dramas and music who toured the mining villages during the war will remember.

A great part of the enjoyment no doubt sprang from the realisation that the barriers which existed between their world



and the big world outside had been broken down. Professional actors and musicians, hitherto creatures of another planet almost, were identified for a brief moment with their audiences as equals. The people, listening astutely to the performance, were consciously aware of a liberating force that was freeing them from their isolation. "To think," they kept saying to themselves as they watched *Hamlet* or listened to Mozart or Beethoven, "to think that these people have come to play to us." It was a poignant expression of their loneliness and a revelation of a complex that, when it manifests itself in political or communal



action, evokes the wrath of everybody who is not aware of the existence of this complex any more than he is aware of what is going to happen tomorrow.

Perhaps it is not altogether the fault of would-be critics that they know so little of what has gone to make the miner what he is. It must be said, in all fairness, that the public are as reluctant to find out more about the miner as he is incapable of telling them what they ought to know—incapable, that is, to a degree. The miner's comparative inarticulateness is the result of his continual preoccupation with the essentials of life. He has been shouting for bread and justice for so long that he has had little time or opportunity to express his soul. Nevertheless, he has a soul, and in the brief



moments that have been at his disposal, he has endeavoured to cultivate it. Out of his own meagre earnings he has built himself halls and institutions, libraries and chapels, and in them he has done his best to entertain himself. He has tried to broaden his mind as much as he could, but his cultural isolation has prevented him from getting more inspiration out than he cared to put in.

It is not surprising, therefore, that very few creative artists have emerged from the mining areas. Of these few, the majority, consciously aware of the limitations imposed upon them from without, go away to create what they can elsewhere (Henry Moore and D. H. Lawrence were sons of miners). The remainder produce work that is too often narrow in its conception and consequently has no appeal to the outside world. Genuine artistic creation in any form presupposes a wide knowledge, and so long as any community is denied the means whereby this can be acquired, any hope of it producing an artist of some calibre must be forlorn indeed. Those works which reflect the lives of mining communities by "outside" artists seldom penetrate below the surface of their subject, and are frequently no more than superficial treatises.

The conclusion to be drawn is, of course, that before anything worth while can come out, something must first be put in. While it may be impossible to change completely the environment in which the miner lives, it can be adapted to accommodate his social aspirations. That rebellious spirit which seems to be innate in him can be absorbed in ways that will be beneficial both to himself and the nation. If it isn't, there is the danger that his intuitiveness will persist long after his memories of the sordid past have died out. (There is no doubt that the differences which crop up between the miners and the Government have their roots in the difference that exists between political ethics acquired by intuition and those acquired mainly by intellectual persuasion.) The mining village, then, must be rescued from its social ostracism; and the sooner the better. There is no reason why each mining village should not become a social centre as well as a coal-producing plant. While the miner is depended upon to restore the economic prosperity of the country, he cannot be depended upon to contribute to the making of a new civilisation unless he is assured that he will share the benefits of that civilisation. To give him a Meco-Moore coal cutter is to give him only half of what he really should have. What will count in the end is the manner in which he has spent his daylight hours.

¹ "THE MINER COMES TO TOWN"
Exhibition: Marble Arch National Coal Board.



Surveying in the "Drift"

Crown Film Unit
From *The Cumberland Story*

Whose Screen?

Films and the Labour Movement

by Donald Alexander

FOR TWO YEARS NOW WE HAVE HAD A Government whose instructions from the electorate were to begin the socialisation of Britain. Certainly this Government has been very busy passing laws and devising economic machinery, so much so that it seems to have taken very little interest in what the mass of the people have been doing or thinking in the meantime. But socialism is not merely a matter of changed laws and economic regulations; it is a new way of living—or nothing; and that new way of living should reflect itself in all the things people do and think about when they are not working—in newspapers, radio, sports, books, theatre, music, art, films.

My immediate grouse concerns films. Fifteen hundred million cinema seats are paid for in Britain every year. By far the most regular buyers are the seventeen to thirty-year-olds who are going to have to put in the maximum amount of effort in the next few years on this job of socialisation, and who certainly won't exert themselves unduly, if they are not interested.

Are the cinemas beginning to reflect the changed way of living of a socialist Britain? Three out of every four films

shown in them come from capitalist America, and we cannot expect much reflection from *them*. Mr. Dalton has now restricted American earnings (and the Americans have peevishly replied by cutting off supplies altogether), but the Governmental motive behind all these manoeuvres seems to be shortage of dollars rather than the excessive incompatibility to socialism of the films themselves. Yet continuous doses of escapism can sap the will to work, at least of young people whose sense of social responsibility nobody has awakened.

What about the other quarter—most of which are produced here at home? We did quite well in wartime with *The Way Ahead*, *The Foreman Went to France*, *Millions Like Us*, and a score of others. Technically, we're still in the front rank, with *Henry V* and *Odd Man Out*. But who is making the progressive films, the films with the real message for the post-war world, as those others had for wartime Britain? Frank Launder and Sydney Gilliat ranked high when they produced *Millions Like Us*. Now they too offer escape—to Stacpoole's *Blue Lagoon*. They were going to tackle the *Life of Karl Marx*, but we haven't heard so much about that lately. Some years

ago now, the Boulting brothers shook the appeasers with *Pastor Hall*; they worked honourably in wartime too. Now they present the defeatist morality *Fame is the Spur*, to be followed by that daring West End success *The Guinea Pig*. Not much help is coming from Ealing Studios either. After they failed to get a West End release for Priestley's *They Came to a City*, they had to arrange for distribution with Mr. Rank—presumably on his terms, for they have not made a "progressive" film since.

The British cinema, like the American cinema, exists primarily to make money out of its audiences, however many film technicians may aspire to proving that there is more to it than that. This is where we want action from Sir Stafford Cripps and the Board of Trade. We need a chain of state-owned or municipal cinemas to compete with the big commercial circuits: there was a chance when the controlling interest in A.B.C. came up for sale, but the Co-operative Movement, who at one time had the first refusal, turned it down, and there wasn't a cheep from the Board of Trade when the American firm, Warner Brothers, stepped in. Of course, the Co-operative Movement has most to answer for, since they command ready money; I was once told by one of their most respected servants that they threw away an officially-offered chance to finance that other enterprise independent film-makers need so badly, a trust-controlled Film Bank.

The Co-operative Movement has made one gesture, which could have enormous effect. Nine months ago the National Film Association was formed, as the film-making and distributing body for the Co-operative Movement, the T.U.C. and the Labour Party. The Trade Press carried a story that the N.F.A. was to produce a feature film *Labour in Power*, though *Kiné-Weekly* added the malicious words, "on full-size stock." Perhaps *Kiné-Weekly* was all too right in hinting that under the proud title was only the amalgamation of the C.W.S. advertising film unit with the 16mm. sub-standard distribution service of the Workers' Film Association. We are still waiting for results.

The truth is that the feature films which are shown in cinemas today do *not* reflect Britain in the process of socialisation. Nor will they, until something which is financially powerful enough to compete with the existing tycoons steps in. And to be financially powerful enough means disposing of a lot of finance. *Caesar and Cleopatra* cost one and a half millions and few feature films today are made for less than £250,000. The capital invested in the cinemas themselves must be nearly

one hundred million pounds. Only the Government, or the Co-operative Movement or the T.U.C. could compete—and not one of them seems to think it matters. At the time of writing this article, we have yet to know whether the Government will give way to the American threat to cut off films from Britain completely: it would be a miracle if this opportunity to gain control of the British screen (by going straight ahead with state financing of production and distribution) were to be seized with both hands.

The T.U.C. is lumped in with the others in this indictment, not only because it has apparently failed to make its weight felt on the council of the National Film Association, but because few trade unions have realised their opportunity and responsibility for the sponsoring of short films, both for showing in the cinemas and, through the 16mm. distribution schemes of the National Film Association and the Central Film Library, to audiences outside the cinemas in factories, welfare halls, institutes, public libraries, schools and so on.

Let me get one thing clear. When I claimed that feature films were not reflecting Britain's process of socialisation, I was not demanding that every film should become a propaganda film. The word propaganda, as misused today, means sentimentalising an untruth for some political purpose. I am interested only in seeing that an ever-increasing quantity of feature and short films are made which will give true and exciting information about every contemporary development, and that means axiomatically about developments in Socialist Britain. I want film to play its part in arousing enthusiasm among the millions of British people who long to believe that the changing face of Britain is a matter for rejoicing and not for melancholy head-shaking.

Who is to pay for the production of short films? They must be sponsored, even when they go to the cinemas, because the present commercial ring will not allow good-quality shorts a high enough proportion of box-office receipts to make speculation a commercial possibility. And many non-theatrical showings (in schools, for example) must surely always remain free, and therefore not remunerative to the film-producer.

Before the war it was commercial interests who paid for most good documentary films, together with national bodies of one kind and another—paid even for films that were of considerable political importance. It was no left-wing organisation, but the National Council of Social Service which called attention not

only to the effects but to the basic causes of unemployment in *Today We Live*. In wartime the Government took over, and because it was Coalition policy to offer the people quite sizeable inducements in return for co-operation in the war effort, the film makers who worked for the Ministry of Information were able to analyse quite a number of social problems and to say honestly what would have to be done about them in the future.

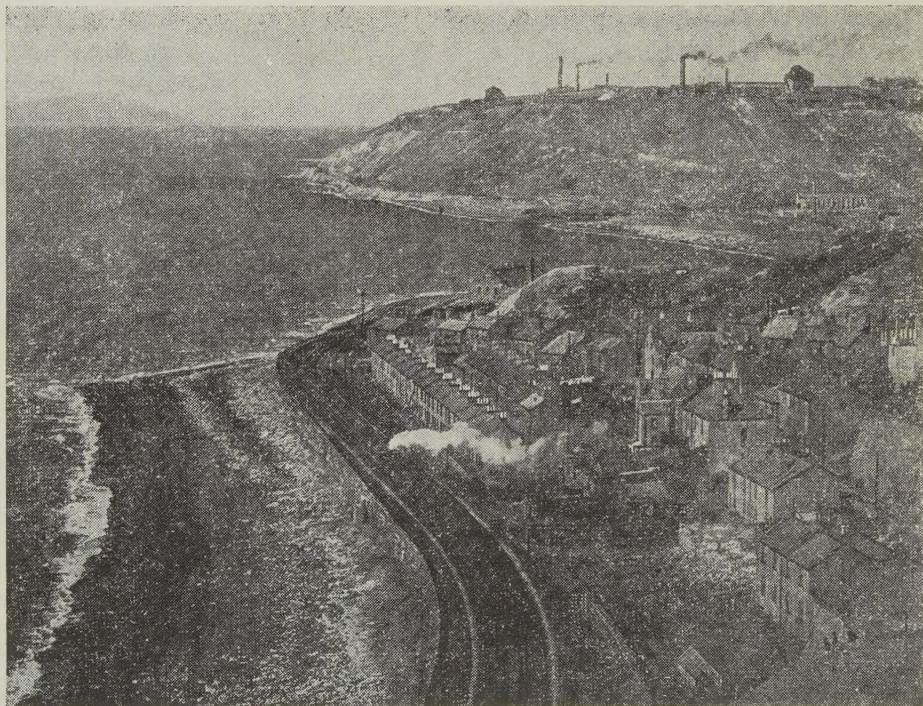
In this post-war world the Central Office of Information must, by order of the Treasury, stick very closely to making films of purely departmental importance. There must be no "party" propaganda. In practice, this means that the C.O.I. films will sometimes explain an Act, but will always be very delicate about the reasons for a Socialist Government proposing the Bill that led to it. It is true that the Chief Planner, Sir Edwin Plowden, now has an information department which is beginning to order films through the C.O.I., but there is nothing emerging yet to invalidate my generalisation. Humphrey Jennings has made a fine film on the production of coal in *The Cumberland Story*; it was left to John Monck of Mr. Rank's *This Modern Age* unit to spotlight the reasons for nationalisation in his *Coal Crisis*. Lately the Paymaster-General, Mr. Marquand, has been investigating the machinery of C.O.I. film production and he should make some interesting discoveries.

Who else is to pay for the forthright

films? The commercial sponsors who saw an advantage in being generous before the war can hardly be expected to do so now: a few large Boards concerned with labour relations for a whole industry may see the need for complete and thorough information by film, but the record of the National Coal Board to date is particularly discouraging. The Co-operative Movement through the National Film Association may, or may not, be full of plans. There remain only educational bodies, such as the Universities, who in any case should not be expected to be interested in more than straightforward teaching films, city and town councils (most of whom are circumscribed as to their use of money, though Manchester has already made *A City Speaks*), and of course the trade unions.

The trade unions *have money*, and a great deal that is useful to say. So far the A.E.U. and the E.T.U. have completed films, and the N.U.T.G.W. has one in production. What contributions could not the Miners or the Railwaymen or the Transport workers or the Textile workers be making at the present time? Do the unions not see that it is not only on their organisation of their workers but on the catching of public sympathy for their organisation that the success or failure of socialist Britain depends? It is impossible nowadays to inform every seeker of information from the level of a soap-

(Continued at foot of page 30)



Collieries on the Cumberland Coast

Crown Film Unit
From *The Cumberland Story*

Mak Siccar : A Poem For Declamation

by Hamish Henderson

I

The Waiting

ARMOUR has foregathered, snuffling
through tourbillions of fine dust.
The crews don't speak much. They've had
last brew-up before battle. The tawny
deadland lies in a silence
Not yet smashed by salvoes.
No sound reaches us
from the African Constellations.
The low ridge too is quiet.
But no fear we're sleeping,
No need to remind us
that the nervous finger of the searchlights
are nearing meeting and time is flickering
and this I think in a few minutes
while the whole power crouches for the spring.
X—20 in thirty seconds. Then begin

II

The Barrage

Let loose (rounds)
the exultant bounding hell-harrowing of sound.
Break the batteries. Confound
the damnable domination. Slake
the crashing breakers-hurled rubble of the guns.
Dithering darkness, we'll wake you! Hélls bélls
blind you! Be broken, bleed
death'shead blackness
The thongs of the livid
firelights lick you
jagg'd splinters rend you
underground
we'll bomb you, doom you, tomb you into grave's mound

III

The Jocks

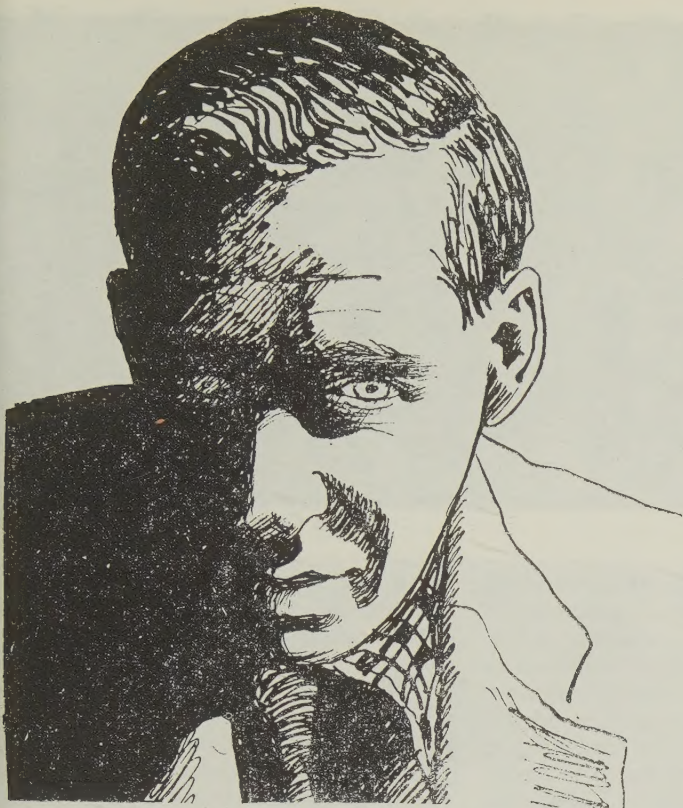
They move forward into no man's land, a vibrant sounding board.
As they advance
the guns push further murderous music
Is this all they will hear, this raucous apocalypse?
The spheres knocking in the night of heaven?
The drumming of overwhelming niagara?
No! For I can hear it! Or is it? . . . tell
me that I can hear it! Now—listen!

Yes, hill and shieling
sea-loch and island, hear it, the yell
of your war-pipes, sealing sound's mountains
guns thunder drowning in their soaring swell!
—The barrage gulfs them: they're gulfed in the clumbering guns,
gulfed in gloom, gloom. Dumb in the blunderbuss black—
lost—gone in an anonymous cataract of noise.
Now again! The shrill war-song: it flaunts
aggression to the sullen desert. It mounts. It's scream
tops the valkyrie, tops the colossal
artillery

Meaning that many
German Fascists will not be going home
meaning that many
will die, doomed in their false dream
We'll mak siccar!
Against the bashing cudgel
against the contemptuous triumphs of the big battalions
mak siccar against the monkish adepts
of total war, against the oppressed oppressors
mak siccar against the leeching lies
against the worked out systems of sick perversion
mak siccar
against the executioner
against the tyrannous myth and the real terror
mak siccar

This poem appears in celebration of the fifth anniversary of the Battle of Alamein, a signal victory against German Fascism.

"Mak siccar": "make sure"—a celebrated phrase in mediaeval Scottish history. After Bruce had stabbed the Red Comyn in Dumfries Kirk, Kirkpatrick and Lindsay found him distraught on the church steps. They asked him what had happened. Bruce told them, and added that he was not sure Comyn was dead. "Are ye no?" said Kirkpatrick. "Aweel, I'll mak siccar!"



Drawing by
Molly Moss

A Last Word on War Books

John Sommerfield

by Jack Beeching

IN HIS DESCRIPTIONS OF R.A.F. LIFE which appeared in various periodicals during the war, John Sommerfield succeeded where many attempted and failed in writing reportage which was thoughtful and passionate, not merely impressionistic. To assemble such fugitive pieces into a book is usually to expose their inadequacies. His new collection of prose, *The Survivors*,¹ is a minor triumph if only because the significance of the sketches is actually enhanced by their being brought between book-covers.

When in uniform, simply to write, whether well or badly, required a certain effort of will. As the war-books accumulate it is possible to sort out some of the most popular attitudes that writers in uniform took when being thrust compulsorily cheek-by-jowl with their fellow human beings. Attempts to create a protective congenial grouping as an "oasis

of culture," or to turn oneself into an uncomplicated, observing eye, or diffidently to delineate one's own miseries of body and mind, struggled with the new impressions and revaluations and conclusions that arose from the necessity of coming to terms with the poorly educated and culturally under-privileged members of the community. The impulse to write so as to differentiate oneself from the dumb cattle struggled with the impulse to write as the mouthpiece, the literate and capable voice, of those who would never be able effectively to express themselves.

A veteran of the Spanish war, Sommerfield came to this problem no doubt with fewer illusions than most of his contemporaries about the nature of war and of the men who become involved in it. The limitations of a documentary technique, of which Sommerfield had been an exponent, and in which the writer was too often treated as a recording machine, his quality being measured almost solely

by his sensitivity, were finally betrayed by the conditions of war, in which the writer became involved as a sentient being. One can trace in this book how reportage became gradually transformed into the germ of an English revolutionary romanticism, combining observation, emotion and cerebration, and placing ordinary man, with all his limitations and hopes, at the centre; a process closely paralleled by the political crisis, which from being before the war the concern of zealots, has now taken the whole country by the scruff of the neck, shaken it hard, and disorganised everyone's "private" life.

The best stories in *The Survivors* are the expression of a realism which does not limit itself to the production of verisimilitudes, but which arises from impressions made on the consciousness of an artist with faith in the ability of his own kind to adapt and survive. At a time when the mood of the moment is one of pessimism and despair, this optimistic attitude is bound to be rather self-conscious, but will no doubt become less so as more people come to a practical and dynamic awareness of the problems with which our society is confronted. It puts real man, not an idealised bourgeois, at the centre of its world, and apprehends the world through a deep understanding of historical development and social structure, an apparatus more complex and penetrative than the mere eclectic patterning of subjective impressions.

To sneer at those who during the war did not come to terms with the harsh, new reality around them is facile and rather unjust. The glib, pre-war, Left Book Club faith in "the revolution" or "the proletariat" (last gasp of old-fashioned romanticism), which was in some cases the middle-class man's groping for an outside force, even a hostile one, that might exorcise his apprehensions, was severely tested in war. Faith in humanity, identification with ordinary people, became a concrete problem in human qualities and relationships in bivouac or on the lower deck. The author set himself, in the best of these stories, a modest aim—to portray truthfully the life he and his fellows were obliged to lead, and to show how under the stress of that new life their ideas were changing. His unequivocal success is partly a result of political conviction or of accidents of rank and service, but partly it is because he lacks that disdain for ordinary people which is part of the make-up of many educated writers, and which by those who are disdained is held to arise from an unconscious assumption that a handsome education automatically entitles the

¹ THE SURVIVORS, John Sommerfield (John Lehmann 8s. 6d.).



The Canterbury Pilgrims (Tempera)

by Courtesy of the British Council
William Blake

possessor to any good jobs and superior conditions that may be going. Now that the country is burning banknotes instead of coal, there is no historical or social justification for this attitude, and writers who have nothing to say to ordinary people will soon have no living person to talk to, and will have to hold converse with the dead.

Though Sommerfield's very self-consciousness once or twice betrays him. When he starts from too narrowly preconceived an idea of what constitutes the heroic or the politically opportune, the very effect for which he strives is less striking than when he takes men as they are, with all their limitations and imperfections. Thus a tale of the cranky fantasies of airmen in Burma, retailed by them across a Calcutta bar to a couple of new arrivals, is more truly moving and heroic than the attitudinising story of militiamen in Spain.

The author appears as a character in the best sketches, and says a sentence or two, but the stories are not autobiographical in the Isherwood sense, where the writer is the star and the characters are satellites. Rather, an understanding has been reached of the people about whom the book is written which is more profound than a mere accumulating of superficial details and quirks of speech, or pigeon-holing as neat psychological textbook case, and which permits self-expression through the portrayal not of self-projections but of real men. A point of solidarity with one's fellows was sometimes reached, under the tight, communal conditions of war, where a projection of oneself into writing inextricably involved those around one, so that an apparent suppression of self, as in the stories of Burma in this book, became in fact an extension of self.

These stories show a development in

technique and approach which may culminate, under conditions of peace, in the delineation of typical character, the creation of people who in their relationships epitomise the whole social movement. The stories about Spain and Ireland, the oldest in the book and the least mature, deal with lay or derived figures and conceived dramatic situations. The writer's idea of truth is superimposed upon the living truth. In the sea stories and the earlier R.A.F. sketches there is a gradual suppression of the personal censorship and emendation of reality with which preceding stores were disfigured, until the author is portraying erks and their ways as exactly as a chart and as vividly as vermillion.

The writer's job is not to embellish things so that they appear as he would like them to be—that is the most effective way, as Hollywood is always demonstrating, of helping things to stay exactly as they are. This impulse towards turning the world into a personal dream grows apace in the fragmentary, dissociated conditions of civilian life, where men conceive that they can to a much greater extent pick and choose the circumstances under which they will rub shoulders with their fellows. John Sommerfield and a few other writers succeeded, within the insulated and specialised groupings of war, in becoming the direct and immediate mouthpiece for a social microcosm, portraying directly and unhesitatingly, impregnating the old documentary forms with new significance. To do the same job in peacetime with equal success it would presumably be necessary to envisage the whole social situation as exactly as one observed the other members of a platoon—a feat of consciousness requiring at first glance freak powers of analytical intelligence and creative imagination. Literature is a "political weapon"—a

means of changing the reader's understanding of the real world and so his actions within it—exactly to the degree that the writer can apprehend and portray the truth about the situation with which he is preoccupied. Essentially, the writer is concerned with a process or pattern of change and it is this pattern which serves as vertebral support to his story or poem. Writing answers all the questions, "how?" "why?" and "if?" about this change, and its quality depends partially upon the accuracy of these answers. When, as in our own time, the whole of society is gripped by fundamental change, which affects every household and to which no established relationship is sacrosanct, the possibility exists for a writer, by depicting typical change, to establish a relationship with his audience and an importance for them comparable with that which Aircraftsman Sommerfield must have had for the other erks on his squadron, whose jokes, grouses and heroic adaptations he has made representative of all serving rankers.

(Continued from page 27)

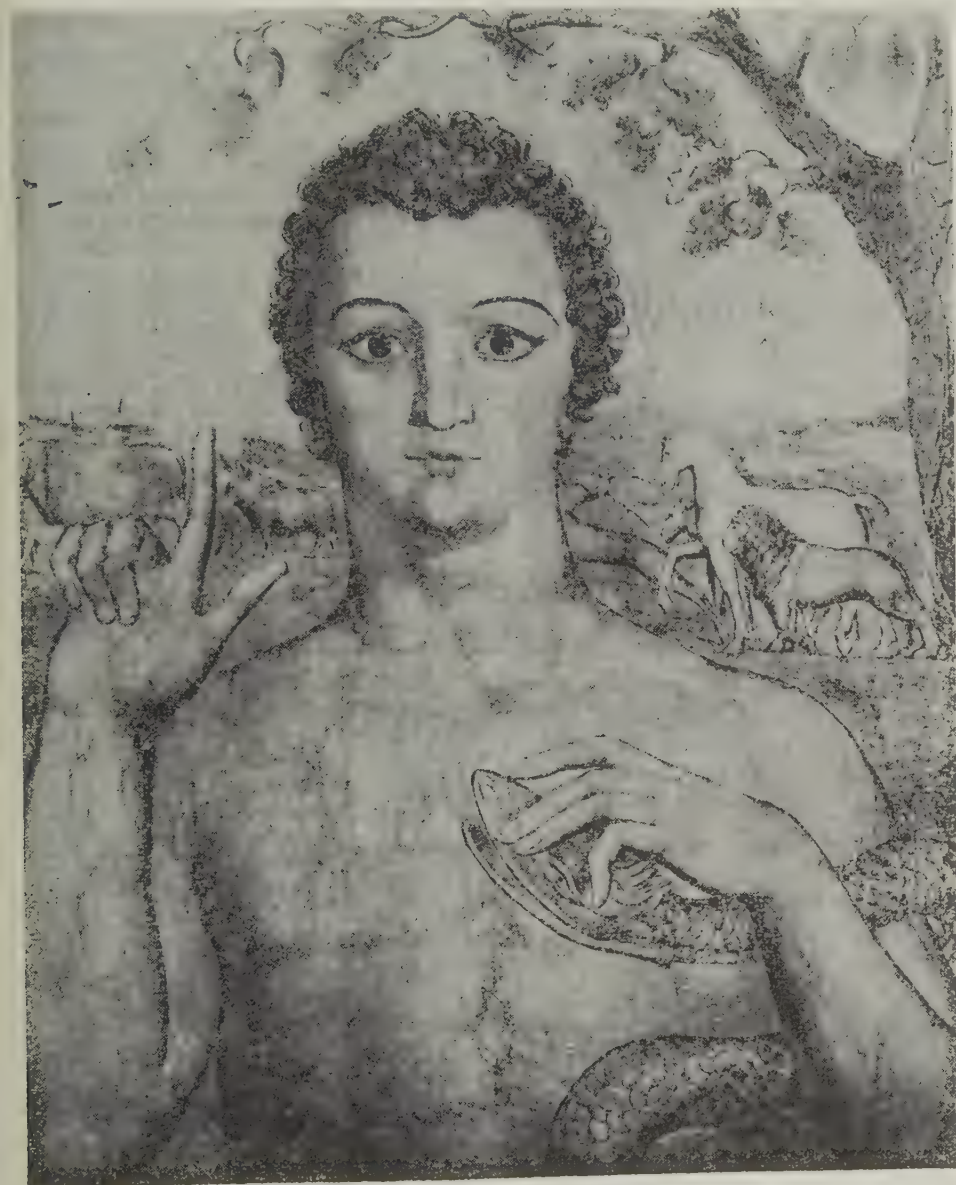
box. A flood of ineptitude is being poured out through press, radio and screen, which inevitably swamps the street-corner orator or even the casual pamphlet. To compete with the reactionary big stuff which is handed out as entertainment to the mass of the people and reckoned unimportant by their leaders, because it is "culture" and not work, there must be even bigger stuff on the side of truth and plenty of it. And once and for all, it must be technically excellent, so that it can rank as "culture" too. There is a high challenge to organised labour today on this account, passing almost unnoticed by leaders and rank and file alike. Who is going to be understanding enough to take it up?

“Nor Can Man Exist But By Brotherhood”

William Blake: The Workman

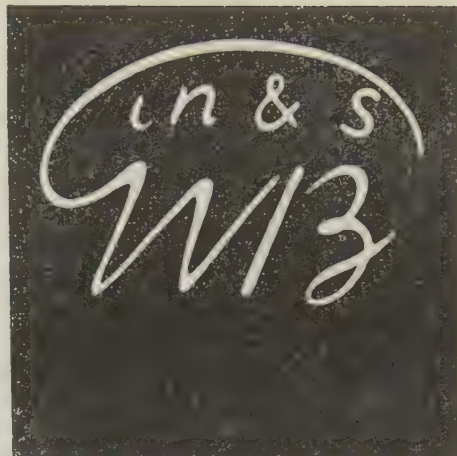
by Randall Swingler

The most comprehensive exhibition ever held of Blake's drawings, paintings, and engravings is now being shown at the Tate Gallery in London. The Exhibition, arranged by the British Council, has been shown earlier in the Kunsthau, Zürich, the Musée Royal des Beaux-Arts, Antwerp, and in Paris. The interest in this Exhibition in Europe has been lively and widespread. In attendance at the opening in Paris were many leading French intellectuals, including Georges Braque, Albert Camus, Jean Cassou, Paul Eluard, Pierre Emmanuel, André Gide, Fernand Léger, André Malraux, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Georges Rouault, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Christian Zervos.



Adam Naming the Beasts (Tempera)

by Courtesy of the British Council
William Blake



IN EUROPE, BLAKE HAS BEEN HARDLY known at all as an artist or engraver, and as a poet he has generally been considered an unsophisticated eccentric with the same kind of interest to the specialist as a Hölderlin or a Lautréamont. It is clear both from the foreign press reviews of this Exhibition and from the reports of popular interest in it, that it has radically altered that valuation.

As artist, poet and man Blake is unique: unique, in particular, by his consistency. There are no contradictions in his work or life, unless between his conception of “Free Love” and the fact of his long and devoted marital fidelity. Even his original method of printing and engraving was an expression of his principles of living and of artistic creation. In reversing the usual process, by painting his lines on the copper in some fluid impervious to acid, and then burning away the vacant surfaces to the required depth, he was expressing his antipathy to imposing abstract patterns upon the virgin mass. The whole artistic aim of his life was to burn away the obscuring surfaces and leave “the wiry bounding line” of definition outstanding. Blake was so rabidly opposed to the demon of “chiaroscuro” in painting, and the “High tame finisher of paltry blots,” because paint seemed to him the medium of illusion, the obscurer of definition, clouding that living essence of things which only pure line could distinguish from the chaotic mass, the “single vision” which is all that the corporeal eye sees.

It is as impossible to separate Blake's art from his life as it is to distinguish his views on art, politics, religion and psychology from each other. Life was all one immense pattern, one tremendous war. The French Revolution, the American War of Independence, were all part of the eternal war of Reason against Energy, Eternity against Time; the Pro-

lific against the Devourer, Desire against Inhibition. In his early revolutionary poems, written while he was consorting with Paine, Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft in the rooms of the radical bookseller Johnson, it is impossible to extricate the vision of the external political events from that part of the perpetual internal struggle within the individual, which is the process of his liberation and development. He was far-sighted enough to see that political struggle cannot be separated from the deepest concerns of the human psyche. He was not a political thinker, a philosopher or psychological theorist merely, though he has been interpreted from all these and many other angles. "The spirit said to him: 'Blake, be an artist and nothing else.'" And he was single-mindedly faithful to that instruction from earliest childhood to his death. He was a man with a vision of the totality of human development:

*Eternity appeared above
him as One Man
Wearing Luvah's robes of
blood
And bearing all his afflictions.*

Albion, the Ancient Man, total humanity, is the organism within which the mythical epics of Milton and Jerusalem are played out. And these are at one and the same time myths of the political struggle engendered between classes and nations by the growth of industrial capitalism and its empires, and of the division and disintegration of the individual's psychological faculties resulting from class-division in society. But Blake delves further than this. Even in nature he perceives this same principle of development through contradiction. Like Shelley, Wordsworth or Coleridge, he was a libertarian in revolt against the deadly slavery of man to the machine, of his natural and spontaneous growth to the mechanical ratio of education, of "Bacon, Newton and Locke." But he was no anarchist, no Utopian, carried away by the emotive associations of the word Liberty. "Without contraries is no Progression." Liberation was the fulfilment, the development of man's faculties through struggle.

"These two classes of men are always upon earth and they should be

enemies: whoever tries to reconcile them seeks to destroy existence."

Yet least of all did he subscribe to any form of mechanical materialism, or the perfectionism of social conditioning. "We have Hirelings in the Camp, the Court and the University, who would, if they could, for ever depress Mental and prolong Corporeal War." Albion, England, human society will be wedded to his Emanation, Jerusalem, the potential ideal society, when he accepts and recognises his Spectre, his opposite:



From the Book of Job

*Spectre of Albion! Warlike Fiend!
In clouds of blood and ruin rolled,
I here reclaim thee as my own,
My selfhood! Satan! arm'd in gold.*

But this can only happen finally, when all the four faculties within society and man (personalised as Los, Urizen, Luvah and Tharmas) have each recognised and absorbed their spectres, frustrated selves, and been united with their respective potential selves or Emanations. Mental and Corporeal war, social struggle and spiritual struggle, must be simultaneous and interacting if the wholeness of the living man is to be achieved.

His artistic method similarly corresponds with his philosophic principles. In his designs form is always emergent from chaos, never imposed upon it. The employment of masses seemed to him unimaginative, inarticulate as the use of actual lumps of earth. Unity emerges from number, harmony from the clash of violent movement, just as drapery is used as a diaphanous veil through which the naked essence can be revealed. Blake's titanic naked forms in his designs, and his celebration of the Human Form

Divine in his poetry, are symbolic of the Prolific, creative power of labouring mankind, of the Energy which is "Eternal delight," and which the prosperous, self-satisfied 18th Century upper-class had so elaborately concealed and scorned. The 18th Century hatred of the body revealed as clearly in the sumptuous extravagance of dress as in the sourest pruderies of Calvinistic dogma, had but another of the distinctive exhibitions of a leisured class, the insignia of a man who had no need to indulge in vulgar manual labour. "Naked Beauty displayed" was for Blake the opposite insignia of labour, the limbs free for work, the natural form of the prolific, of energy.

For Blake thought of himself primarily as a workman, which indeed he was, earning his living arduously by his graver for the length of his life. He campaigns bluntly and forcibly in his writings for the right of the artist to be treated as a workman, to be free of patronage and toadying to fashion. His predilection for Gothic art gained when as an apprentice he was commissioned by

Bazire to make designs of various Gothic churches and monuments in London, no doubt led him to look upon himself in the light of a Gothic artisan, to experiment with tempera and dream of constructing movable frescoes for the decoration of public buildings and public occasions; an idea similar to that which has inspired the contemporary revival of tapestry in France.

This country could hardly count on a worthier or more timely export in present times than the ideas and inspiration of William Blake. To a world dithering in apprehension of collectivisation, stricter

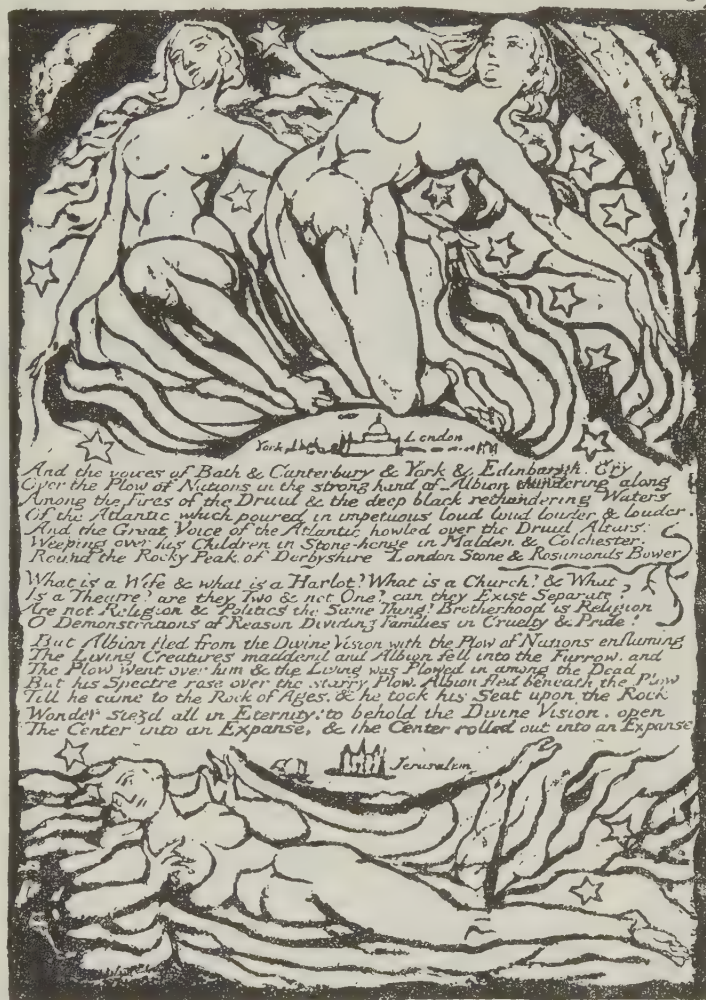
by Courtesy of the British Council
William Blake

controls, further regimentation, he comes as a prophet of the creative development of the individual within an harmonious society. "Nor can Man exist but by Brotherhood." Blake was not the enemy of Reason, or of rational control. He was opposed to the strict domination of a fixed system of thought, or a rigid system of society which frustrated the creative development of the mind through imagination, or of the community through productive labour. It was not the destruction of Urizen by Los which brought Jerusalem back to Albion, but the harmonious relation of all the faculties one with another in the human psyche, as in human society. Man has nothing to fear from planning and collectivisation, so long as it is organic and not despotic. In fact it is only through more efficient organisation that the faculties can be harmonised and unity achieved.

Blake's work is difficult and eccentric for the most part because he was speaking to no clearly-realised audience, and outside of the commonly accepted tradition. He received no form of common education. His mind took to itself from a spontaneously acquired culture those images which suited his peculiar order of thought. Consequently his thinking remained always on that imaginative, mythical plane which children and primitive peoples inhabit. He learned from experience to perceive objects directly and to absorb them into the concrete forms of his imagination. He never learned, as children do who are submitted to an abstract system of education, to recognise in objects the *simulacra* of a previously imposed visual pattern. Unlike most of us, who see in an actual tree the representation of a picture from which we have learned the name, Blake saw the essential object directly. But while his vision remained unobscured, this lack of education has its drawbacks for us in regard to his mode of expression. For education is the means of transmitting a common culture from generation to generation, a common set of symbols and images. Since the imagination only bodies forth real processes going on in the depths of the mind, Blake found

appearing in his imagination figures and patterns such as have appeared in all the mythologies of the world: but having no knowledge of these, he was compelled to believe them to be quite new and to give them names of his own invention.

Too many attempts have been made to identify these imaginative figures by their names, before discovering what their essential significance must be from the drama which Blake so faithfully reported from the battlefield of his imagination.



From Jerusalem

by Courtesy of the British Council
William Blake

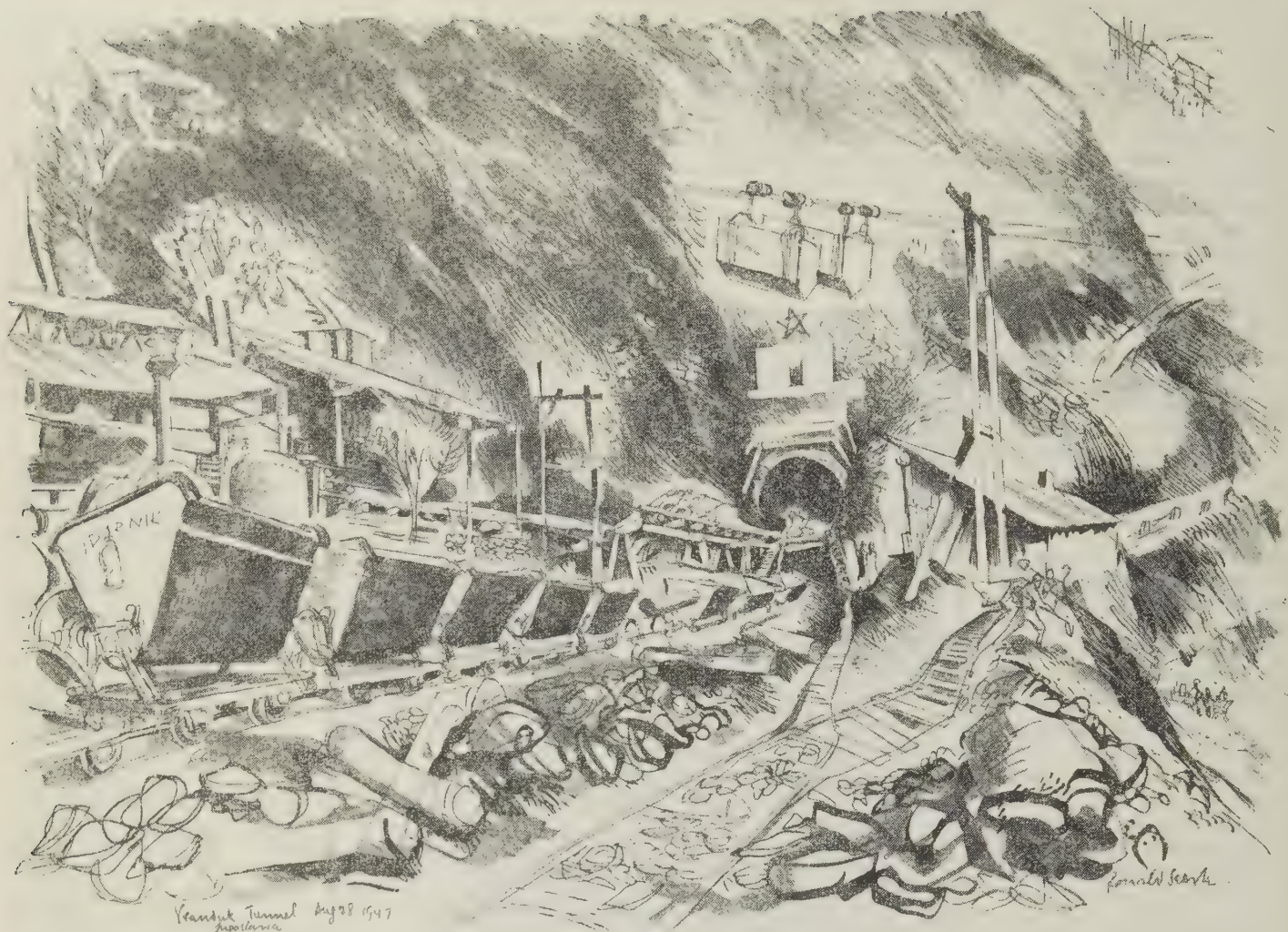
It is interesting to notice that his thought is clearest and the form of his poetry purest and most traditional, in those works composed for performance to a close and sympathetic audience, such as the *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, written and performed for that little literary circle which met at Mrs. Matthews': and the *Everlasting Gospel* written towards the end of his life, when Linnell had gathered around the ageing poet a group of artistic admirers. The sprawling, obscure and often incoherent

"prophetic books" were written when Blake had given up hope of being heard by the world, and when his only audience was Ezekiel, Milton, Dante and the angels and devils within his own person. But while he dwelt creatively within the mythical world of his own imagination, in sense and experience, in work and life, he remained always involved in the real world, and chiefly in his beloved London, which he saw growing from the market town surrounded by green fields and

villages, into the great industrial "wen" spreading around the Port of London. His life was more or less co-eval, too, with the coming to maturity of a new class, the industrial proletariat; a maturity signalled three years after his death by the inauguration of the first Grand National Trades Union. Obscure, "mad," confused and eccentric in utterance as he often was, he, more than any British poet or artist before or since, both in ideas and action and imaginative creation, remains the voice of that class's potentiality, and will undoubtedly receive even greater understanding and appreciation than we can yet give, from generations to come.

There is an element of genuine prophecy in his work, arising from his capacity to see through the actuality of his time to the fundamental laws which govern the perpetual process of change in nature. From his observation of changing society he deduced those very principles of development through contradiction which were enunciated in scientific form by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels more than fifty years later. Not that his prophetic books are ever likely to become popular reading: but an understanding of them will become increasingly unavoidable to the student of art and literature, or of human nature, as its developmental struggle accedes to higher levels, and "mental" supersedes "corporeal" war.

The full titles of the engravings on these pages are *Behold Now Behemoth which I made with Thee* and *The Emanation of the Giant Albion*.



Vranduk Tunnel, Youth Railway, Yugoslavia

Ronald Searle

Comments on a People's Culture

by E. P. Thompson

FACED WITH THE MOST INSPIRING developments in the history of Man, the guardians of "western culture" continue to look on with hostility. Of course we can't expect them to understand in a moment what is happening in the new democracies in Europe. Few have been subjected to the same tests of physical and spiritual guts as their intellectual counterparts in once-occupied Europe. They have not taken part as comrades in a movement in which the spirit of Man has been changing before their own eyes. We cannot expect them to understand at once the people's culture which is being built out of such experiences, but from serious critics we should hope at least for grave and sympathetic attention.

It seems that, however much they bicker among themselves, this is one matter which is cut-and-dried in their minds. They found out some time ago that a real world of real people was too much for them, and built up their own world of myths, Yogis and Commissars. Day by day in the pages of their journals, *Horizon*, *Polemic* and the rest, the same tearful fairy-story is told—of the intellectual, "chased through communal corridors and offices into a new kind of isolation amidst the machinery and slogans of the collective international world" (the words are Mr. Spender's). "Politics" (a dirty business, really) is the enemy, and for those countries where cultural work is at last winning a man-sized social function they have nothing but laments. Here, for instance, Mr. V.

S. Pritchett is caught repeating the same clichés:

A writer may thrive on the preaching of revolution but he is its natural victim. The pessimistic dictum, "All art is propaganda," dissolves into the blank command: "Only our propaganda is art." And political criticism, once so stimulating, easily degenerates into the prosecutor's casuistry. Caught in that net the writer wakes up too late to rediscover the fundamental hostility between the wintry political will and the creative imagination. They inhabit different climates.¹

It is a pity that so few of these critics have taken the opportunity of finding out for themselves the climate in which a people's culture is born. What is this

¹New Statesman and Nation, September 27, 1947.

climate like in Yugoslavia, for instance? Certain changes have taken place in this country during the past five or six years, and—

These changes, Comrade Deputies, effect a fundamental transformation of things, men and relationships. These changes explain all our successes. Our peoples would be experiencing grim and difficult times had western democracy been imposed upon them by some unfortunate accident after the war. As a result of these changes we have the unparalleled enthusiasm, political activity, spirit of abnegation and creative initiative of the working class and of all the workers in our homeland. The working people, emancipated from class and national oppression, have closed their ranks in the struggle for the creation of a better and happier future.²

These are revolutionary changes. "Human nature" itself is being changed by human agency, as men learn to control nature and to master their own destinies. No climate could be more fertilising to the creative imagination, were it not that these changes are so swift that writers and artists are left breathless in the effort to keep pace with life.

Our friends in the new democracies do not resent criticism. I have never before been in an atmosphere where criticism was so welcomed, as a first obligation of friendship. They do resent hostility, when it takes the form of mud-slinging and hypocrisy. They are working very hard indeed at the moment. The demands of the people for all forms of creative work are insatiable. Their problems, of finally banishing illiteracy, of nourishing national and popular traditions, or raising the cultural level of a whole people, are enormous. When they make mistakes they do not expect to be met with jeers.

The truth is that we are witnessing now in England an alarming depreciation in the standards of intellectual integrity among certain ruling cultural circles. The political crisis has greatly accelerated this process, a process which has the closest parallels in the political, the journalistic and literary worlds. There has always been a ready anti-Soviet and anti-Communist market, but it is with disgust that one watches Mr. Hector McNeil, Mr. A. J. Cummings and Miss Rebecca West scrabbling in it beside the usual commercial hacks. Nor is the currency employed by the "liberal" newcomers to the cultural black-market

any less debased than that of their fore-runners. They pass the same well-thumbed slogans, the clichés green with verdigris. Rules of evidence and the customary ethics of controversy are dismissed. (Readers interested in these phenomena may turn to "Books in General" in the *New Statesman* of September 6 where Mr. Raymond Mortimer writes a review that is abusive and tendentious, on a subject of which he openly advertises his own ignorance.) The "climate" here is depressingly like that in the United States when the Un-American Activities Committee got under way. The tune is played here with more subtlety and the methods of salesmanship are less vulgar. But the similarities are there.

If our critics were honest, they would admit that their grouse is not with the organisation of the arts in socialist or near-socialist countries but with the artists themselves. The great majority of the active intellectuals in these countries are co-operating enthusiastically in tackling the new tasks and problems before them. It is to explain away this fact that the world of myth is invoked. Disappointed at finding that there is no reputable body of intellectuals in these countries who, faced by the upsurge of hope and self-confidence among their peoples, will echo the cries of pessimism from the West, our critics must pass dark reflections on the liberty of the artist in the Soviet Union and the new democracies. It is hinted that the artist lives under a continuous moral terrorism, and that if he works for and among the people he has "compromised and submitted" to "The Party." His liberty, even his life, would be in danger if he were to write about the really poetic things of life—such as water-rats, gangrene and sexual infirmities.

All this is relevant to a people's culture. Mr. Koestler and his friends have got away so successfully with the myth of the Commissar ("the wintry political will") that we have all become fuddled, and only a good dose of the free air of the People's Republics can clear our system. The climate in these countries certainly has changed. The people don't have much time for artists who are concerned only with exhibiting the dusty corners of their own personalities. (If they want to do this, no one will stop them. Only they must expect to come in for some hard criticism, and neither the State nor the trade unions and popular organisations are going to support them while they do it.) But only a writer hopelessly insensitive to the life and people around him would wish to be writing now about childhood neuroses. The stories of the

resistance in Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, for instance, stagger imagination. They are stories, not of blind heroism, but of conscious sacrifice and endurance, in which the great issues of history—of freedom, human dignity and the survival of the arts themselves—were decided. Is it really suggested that the writer is such a precious creature that if he chooses these subjects he is soiling his hands? Or that he should stand aside while the people and youth of his country are building, with pride and conscious understanding, the economy of their own country with their bare hands?

Writers who concern themselves with these subjects do so because they *want* to do so. They *want* to do so, because they are writing about real people and changing people.

In Bulgaria I was able to talk with many of their leading writers, and, both there and in Yugoslavia, I always asked this question: "Do you find any conflict between your creative work and politics?" The answer—from Communists and non-Communists alike—was always, first a look of bewilderment, and then, as if memories of old pre-war arguments had suddenly been recalled, "No." In one way or another they all explained that the health of their writing *depended* on their social activity. If they had a definite project in mind they might apply for a three or six-months grant to retire and complete the work. But in general they preferred to work with the cultural organisations which kept them in touch with the people, to visit the factories, the youth railways and the voluntary labour schemes and write from direct experience in their spare time. As for propaganda, that is not their province, except in so far as they can help to mobilise the creative spirit of the people. Their responsibility is *moral* rather than political in any narrow sense (and when has the artist *not* had a moral responsibility?) for they can help to shape the features of the New Man.

I was able to ask Georgi Dimitrov this question: "What are the main tasks before writers and cultural workers in Bulgaria today?" He answered: "First, to represent in their art the heroic labour of the people for the Two Year Plan. Second, by constant application and study to increase their mastery of their own art-forms." He spoke in greater detail of the work before the sculptors, re-creating in stone the spirit of the partisans, and of that before the satirists, in scalding those who are trying to sabotage the people's efforts. These tasks implied no break with the traditions of Bulgarian art, for these are

²From the speech of Andrija Hebrang, Chairman of the Federal Planning Commission of Yugoslavia, introducing the Five Year Plan in the National Assembly on April 26, 1947.

revolutionary traditions, at one with the aspirations of the people. Christo Botev, the father of Bulgarian poetry, fought in the woods in the nineteenth century as a partisan, and died in the struggle for the liberation of his people from the Turks. After the Fascist coup of 1923 no artist was safe from persecution and many met terrible deaths. Culture was never prised away from the people in Bulgaria, so that now one is faced by a sense of sudden creative release, a flowering whose roots were well established under the Fascist crust.

The answer to the critics of "political" writing is implicit in Dimitrov's reply. No amount of political-consciousness will by itself make an indifferent, slack or untrained artist create good art. What is raised by opponents as a general theoretical platform for attack is seen, in this new climate, to be a problem requiring hard work on the part of the artist and a critical atmosphere on the part of the audience. Many have been frightened away from "political" writing in England, not because the theory is incorrect, but because the work of a few of our own left-wing artists in the '30s turned out to be superficial and unsatisfying—and also, perhaps because a percentage of the Soviet fiction rushed out by the catch-crop publishers during the war was of the "pot-boiler" variety so recently censured in the Soviet Literary Controversy. (This demand for the sharpening of critical standards, and not the Zoshenko business, was the really significant aspect of the affair.) Some of our left-wing writers allowed their sense of urgency at day-to-day political problems to develop at the expense of their powers of observation and imagination. The fault lay not in the political content of their writing, but in the fact that their work was not deeply enough realised. Man, after all, is a political animal, just as much as he is an animal who makes love, turns a lathe, and builds flower-gardens. To exclude any of these activities is to tell only a part of the truth, and few activities can be understood in isolation from the others. Certainly, for a poet to set into rhyme a number of slogans, or for a novelist to jerk his characters here and there in accordance with a mechanism, springing not from the characters themselves but from the requirements of some political formula, is just plain bad work. But who is defending it?

This problem is largely solved by the march of history itself. Where the politically-conscious writer takes part as a member of a minority movement, comprising only the most advanced elements of the people, he is continually



Dynamiter : Vranduk Tunnel, Yugoslavia

Ronald Searle

tempted to exaggerate, to cut reality to fit his theme. There is, I would suggest, a transition period from the time when the writer may best, in isolation and by searching analysis, lay bare the structure of society, to the time when the writer participates wholeheartedly in a great movement of the people and finds in this movement both his inspiration and his audience. In this transition period many of our writers are still becalmed, but the time of final decision is very near.

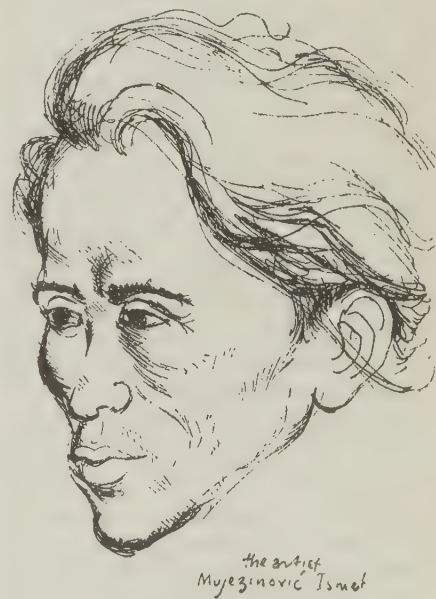
In the new democracies the problem has passed once and for all from the realm of theory to the realm of practice. Just as they are no longer discussing there whether industry should be nationalised or not, but *how soon, where, and in what way* the new industries can be built, so the artists are discussing *the best ways* of meeting the increasing demands of the people—not whether it is right to meet them at all. The transformation from capitalism to socialism has switched the attention of artists *outwards*, to the social and political life of man, instead of increasingly inwards to small intersections of personal relationships and to private symbolism. They are aware of all the dangers of oversimplification. They agree instantly that characters in their novels must be fully and imaginatively conceived. If they portray Fascists as beasts it is not because this is politically correct, but because the Fascists *are* beasts and are known to the people as beasts. To write in any other way after the years of war would be to falsify the truth.

This outlook is the outlook of a socialist realism, a much abused term, describing the *attitude* of the artist to his work rather than the forms he uses. It is necessary to distinguish socialist realism from naturalism, let us say, or symbolism, which are *means* the artist employs to reach and represent most forcefully the truth. If naturalism is gaining the ascendancy in certain fields, this is not because these schools have received some stamp of theoretical sanction from "The Party" but because of the conditions in these largely peasant countries. Meanwhile the most lively controversies are continuing, and if the statements of the dominant schools are somewhat pontifical, this is in the true tradition of controversy and Mr. Connolly, among others, is in no position to take exception. Artists continue to work out their own means of expression, and developments in the West (and particularly in France) are followed by the young intellectuals with the closest attention. Mr. Connolly must surely know that *Horizon*, in common with

Time, the *Daily Mail*, and the rest, is on sale in the bookshops of Belgrade.

The real danger to critical standards comes not from "outside" dictation but from the pressure of work. Culture has been forced out into the open and it is now a public business. No public ceremony in Yugoslavia or Bulgaria is complete without the declamation of poems written in honour of the occasion. Art is everybody's business, and if the artist is one of the most highly-respected of public men, he is also subject to the heaviest demands. The shortage of trained artists in Yugoslavia is felt as keenly as the shortage of miners and building workers in England. If the painter attempts to retire to work out his own ideas he is liable to be visited by a deputation from the local trade union: "Comrade, what are you doing in this dusty attic? Don't you know that we are opening a new workers' canteen? Why don't you come out and paint the walls of our trade union club?" If he sets up a canvas he is at once surrounded by a group of peasants, approving, criticising or shaking their heads sadly. Not only must he attend to his creative work, but he may also have lectures and instruction to give, and obligations to the cultural organisations. It is tempting for him to learn tricks of mass production and to let his own critical standards fall, to churn out poems studded with clichés and stylised portraits of popular heroes. This is a real problem, but it is one for which they were not unprepared. These tendencies

are being fiercely resisted. Moreover, it is a transitory problem, which, again, the advance of history will solve. The national folk traditions are undergoing a vigorous revival—Macedonia is a brilliant example. New schools of artists are arising from among the people and are gaining experience. On the Youth Railway groups of art students and young architects are given the entire responsibility for designing and decorating many wayside stations. Every wall-newspaper has its quota of poems by the young peasants and students, and in the evenings there are dramatic performances, poems are recited, and national dances are performed. (On the Bulgarian Youth Railway I saw one evening a really first-class performance of *As You Like It* by dramatic students from Sofia.) It is here that one appreciates the real significance of a people's culture. They are concerned in the new democracies first with raising the cultural standards of the whole people, in rediscovering their national and international heritage, and in creating favourable conditions in which the young writers, artists and musicians will work. They are not unduly concerned with the forcing of individual genius, since they know that from the new schools working among the people and throughout the country, leaders of genius will arise. For those who have a *ready* established themselves the greatest consideration is given. I met more than one artist, at first hostile or indifferent to the new régime, but now enthusiastic at the new opportunities and



Portrait Ismet
Serbia War, Sarajevo August 27.9.7.

Mujezinović Ismet, Yugoslav Artist

Ronald Searle

generous conditions of work. There is no capitalist country where the social position of the cultural worker is so respected.

The critics of the new democracies do not like what is happening because they do not want a people's culture. If they admitted this honestly then they could be met in healthy controversy. They do not want it because, in the final analysis, they do not trust the people. The culture of the West, capitalist culture, is for them a vested interest. They are protecting a poetry which is confined to expressing a tiny segment of human experience, and are tormented by the knowledge that gusty history will soon blow down the door. They are tormented by the fear that the people may become the arbiters of their worth, instead of an increasingly select and isolated clientèle. They are protecting their culture for the same reason that capitalism is protecting them, for their culture is the ideological defence-work of a dying civilisation. By their injections of pessimism, their doses of mystification, and their continual advocacy of withdrawal and retreat, they are preventing the fresh air of the 20th century from reaching our veins.

This is a timely lesson from the new democracies. There are indeed two cultures and two climates. There is not one culture for the intellectuals and one for the people, but the cultures of two opposed classes, a People's Culture and the decaying culture of capitalism. Have we forgotten this during the illusory unity of the war? From Yugoslavia and Bulgaria they look to us in Britain with friendship but with bewilderment. Have we lost all sense of urgency? Why do the British writers make no protest against the intolerable threats of further wars and the renewed stirrings of Fascism? Why do we retreat defensively before the prophets of despair instead of throwing back our challenge, our affirmation of faith in the common people? Why do we compromise with an art which was exposed over fifty years ago by William Morris:

... an art cultivated professedly by a few, and for a few, who would consider it necessary—a duty, if they could admit duties—to despise the common herd, to hold themselves aloof from all that the world has been struggling for from the first, to guard carefully every approach to their palace of art. Or have we still not heard his warning?

Once again I warn you against supposing, you who may specially love art, that you will do any good by attempting to revivify art by dealing with its dead exterior.

The beginnings of Social Revolution must be the foundations of the rebuilding of the Art of the People.

What Goes On

by John Manifold

THERE USED TO BE A SONG, "THE HIGHER up the mountain, the greener grows the grass." Geographically, I couldn't say, but socially it's as false as hell. The higher up the social or organisational scale, the stupider, weaker and less interesting is the story. Take the descending scale of Councils—British, Arts, County and City, Borough, and the proportion or ratio of achievement to wealth increases as you descend.

Councils, British

The British Council in Vienna—the chaps who allowed Professor (*Road to Serfdom*) Hayek to speak, but banned Sir William Beveridge—have now sent us the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. Now that orchestra was purged of Nazis once, but for this visit it seems to have been specially unpurged again. Its leader is the notorious Wolfgang Schneiderhahn, SS-man, and some of the players are regarded in their own country as unrepentant Nazis.

I concede that the Austrians are better off without these boyos, but why use London as the rubbish-bin? In spite of Mr. Churchill's jeremiads, the difference between Great Britain and Devil's Island is still quite perceptible—except maybe to the British Council. When this orchestra toured France and Switzerland, they went "purged," and had a success, which they deserved. Why did the British Council have to unpurge them? I'm glad the Musicians' Union is taking action, though they haven't laid enough emphasis on the political aspect.

Councils, Arts

Not quite so determinedly cretinous as big-brother, the Arts Council has merely withdrawn support from Glasgow's Unity Theatre, apparently in order to subsidise *Jane Steps Out* and *My Wives and I* in London. They seem to have reversed the Robin Hood policy, and to be robbing the poor to give to the rich. Glasgow Unity continues to stage very good plays, and to stage them very well indeed, with a natural and intelligent emphasis on Scottish themes and the Scottish language. So the Arts Council prefers to ensure that more plays of feeble kind are produced in London. Coals to Newcastle!

Even if they fancy themselves as a *Deus ex Machina*, surely it isn't obligatory to move in such a mysterious way?

Councils, A.M.D., Regional

Here we're well down the mountain, and the grass is a lot more plentiful. A.M.D., as in CAMDIN and TAMDA, means Arts, Music and Drama. Northumberland and Tyneside support these particular associations, and seem to support them very well. I'm really sorry to have missed the Drama

Festival at Gateshead, and Alan Bush's *Press-Gang* opera at Dalston Hall. Before moving South, I had better say under this heading that Glasgow drew off quite a few Edinburgh-Festival visitors to see the Citizens' Theatre's *John Knox*, and that Glasgow Unity impressed the Festival audiences very much with Gorki's *Lower Depths*—as much, I hope as they impressed London with it last year.

Councils, municipal and sundry

London is to have a central Music Library. Mrs. Winifred Christie-Moor, widow of Emmanuel Moor, the composer who invented a remarkable double-keyboard piano, has given £10,000 towards this admirable form of memorial to him. Westminster City Council has offered to house and administer the Library, and it will be opened this autumn. Musicians will be thankful. There could be no better way of commemorating an excellent musician.

Islington, St. Pancras and Paddington are among the borough councils which artists and public have reason to approve of. Sixty-six local organisations took part in St. Pancras's Arts and Civic Week. I have no more information about Paddington's than that it is a fact. Call it coincidence, if you like, but Paddington has been holding borough anti-Fascist meetings too. Anti-Fascism is a cultural activity. Islington Public Libraries are issuing a well-written brochure on books, current affairs, and local library-sponsored artistic and dramatic work, which other boroughs might well copy.

Soho, soho, this world doth pass

The Artists' International Association has left Charlotte Street for 15 Lisle Street, Soho. The new premises are small but agreeable. Since back in 1936 when a Montparnasse café hired me to sit about in a huge black hat and attract tourist customers, I've distrusted "arty" localities; they aren't good for artists. But the Charlotte Street centre did some excellent work, and I'm delighted there is to be a continuation of it. The A.I.A. can be trusted not to let the atmosphere, or anything else, get them down. There's not a lot of room in the new place, but they like visitors.

W.M.A.

The Workers' Music Association gets some Well-Merited Applause. Ever since they moved from Great Newport Street to their new premises at 17, Bishop's Bridge Road, Paddington, they have been working like Jugoslavs, and now some recognition has come.

The W.M.A. choir, alone among the delegations to Prague's International Festival this summer, represented British cultural achievement. Not, you will observe, the British Council, not the Arts Council, but the Workers' Music Association. They had a colossal success in every possible way: they put British choral music on the new-European map, they won a flock of diplomas and a big bronze shield, and they "clicked" good and proper with their Czech hosts.

They reported-back at King George's Hall and sang their Prague programme, a few weeks ago, still in magnificent singing form. I must say, a Byrd in the hands of Bush is worth two in anyone else's. After meeting so many bodies with straws in their hair, it's a nice change to meet one with a feather in its cap.

Their London work, hitherto handled by the national executive, is henceforward to be run by a London branch. Volunteers are required in vast numbers; and they'll be in on a good thing.

The Vogue in Music

From Pepusch to Ernst Meyer, distinguished foreign musicians have never ceased begging the English to take some notice of the English musical heritage. Don't look now, but I think their advice is being followed. The Third Programme, within a matter of weeks, has given us *Cupid and Death*, *The Judgment of Paris*, *Venus and Adonis*, the resplendent *Music for the King's Sackbuts and Cornets*, and at least two of Boyce's symphonies. Gibbons and Dowland are beginning to take their rightful place in string-orchestra repertoires. Cambridge University has performed Purcell's *Dioclesian*. Since our imports of other goods are being so drastically reduced, it's nice to think that we could, at a pinch, hold out for some years on home-grown music.

Musical snobs, take note: you may turn Purcell into "Purcèlle," but you can't do much with my personal trinity of Locke, Jenkins and Morley. I recommend "Purcèlle"-addicts to try pronouncing Lawes "Lavess," and see where it gets them.

The amateurs are the people most concerned in an "English renaissance." I should like to hear a lot more amateur string-quartets playing Cooper and Jenkins, and when the fine working-class brass players in the north get hold of the *Sackbuts and Cornets* music, that'll be a day!

What's Up in Shangri-la

The editor of *Horizon* is appealing for American food-parcels for his contributors. The one great inconvenience of the old Ivory Tower used to be those long, long stairs a-winding down to the tradesmen's entrance. Now-a-days you merely set out a begging-bowl on the roof, and whacking great American eagles sail past at intervals, dropping food into it. Thus freed from their last degrading contact with solid earth, the booksy boys can get happily on with whatever it is that they are supposed to do. That's the theory, anyway. In practice, the only way of getting official American help is to claim that you are saving someone or something from Communism. *Horizon* could make out quite a good case on those lines, since you must admit that it provides bright, chatty entertainment, designed to prevent chaps from getting morbid and dwelling on things. I recommend the idea to Mr. Connolly. After all, the Yanks don't know him anything like as well as we do.

Theatre

Mr. Priestley Digs at the Roots

DUCHESS: The Linden Tree by J. B. Priestley.

Reviewed by Montagu Slater

PRIESTLEY'S *The Linden Tree* RAISES issues so much wider than itself that even if it had been a bad play it would have been worth thinking about closely: and since for me at any rate it is one of the most satisfying plays in the Priestley canon it seems worthwhile to stop and ask, "What is there satisfying about it?" All the more because some intelligent members of the audience watched the play closely and still said no. There is, then, something to argue about.

The play could have been a very ordinary assemblage of contemporary types and topics. There's a stock exchange spiv, there's his sister who worked with the Fighting French and turned Catholic to marry a Proustian French landowner, there's another sister a Communist and a doctor whose mechanistic complacency is shattered by an unfortunate love affair, and if this makes her ineffective it also makes her less self-centred than the other two. Says Priestley through the mouth of his Professor, "The young and old are the best now: there's a lot of dead wood in the middle." Those three are the dead wood in the middle, or most of it.

The young also have three delegates, starting with a couple of students, gawky, provincial text-book chewers with some heat in argument but no light. The third is the 'teen-year old music-loving type who creeps upstairs to play Elgar's Violoncello Concerto. Hers is the real voice of youth for Priestley and a bad one, I think. Her musical enthusiasms seem to me uncritical and we need uninhibited criticism as well as enthusiasm from the young.

If the young are not very striking, what about the old? The stock exchange spiv, the Catholic, the Communist and the 'cellist are one family, the Linden Tree. Father Linden is professor of history in Red Brick University, played by Sir Lewis Casson. Mother is Dame Sybil Thorndike at her most infuriating and most humane, the mother of sixty, irresistible as a bull-dozer. If his young don't make Priestley's point the old make a good shot at it. But what—what is Priestley's point?

The argument of the play as most readers know by now is fairly evenly balanced. Professor Linden has passed retiring age. He is unpopular with the new Vice-Chancellor (off stage) who Linden thinks is too much the mechanistic planner, too little the humanist. Mrs. Linden after forty years of soot and tram-clatter is offered retired leisure by stock-exchange spiv and campaigns to force Prof. Linden to retire, even carrying it to the point of leaving him.

Prof. Linden digs his heels in. In spite of wife, in spite of children, in spite of students who think his humanism unsuitable for examination students, in spite of Vice-Chancellor, in spite of candid friend he sticks it (and 'teen-ager, with 'cello, stays with him).

The symbolism is clear enough. The provincial town becomes England: the professor becomes a sort of humanised export drive, while the tempters of this St. Anthony in seven deadly voices ask "Why bother?" Thus you get a characteristic provincial realism with a spice of topical symbolism which is all the better because there's right on both sides. If you argue by simple commonsense Mrs. Linden's right all along the line though her methods might be thought too unscrupulous. Interest is sustained because the balance of justice wavers. But, honestly, as I've described it, doesn't the whole thing sound dull? Yet the truth is, as I explained at the beginning, I find it the reverse. I wonder if it is possible to explain why?

The form, realistic middle-class problem play, has certainly lost its freshness. It was right for Ibsen's middle period though only when put to a strain of far higher tension than Priestley postulates. The Professor and his sixty-year-old wife may or may not live apart for a month or two but who can pretend it matters very much? Seeing this play on the stage it seems reasonably clear that Priestley, as well as his chief players, have transcended the form chosen.

The form chosen, fresh or not, brings out Priestley's strength. Compare this play for example with *Ever Since Paradise* in which he attempts to add a dimension to naturalism and it is at once clear that *The Linden Tree* is twice as effective. So the form suits him—and he has transcended it. What do I mean by that?

One of the qualities of realism is that the portraitist may in fact be making points far more interesting than those he thinks he's making. *The Linden Tree* is a conversation piece, a portrait of a family. Priestley is instinctively trying to get to the heart of this business of living in families as it was practised whole-heartedly in the provinces up to 1914 and half-heartedly since. He portrays some such family at the last moment of its disintegration, and perhaps the disintegration of the ideas that sustained it. I believe he does all this instinctively and the topical catch-lines he gives to his carefully chosen types are relevant only on a very superficial level. These types are right not because they give a fair cross-section of "the issues of 1947" but because this is roughly how a cultivated provincial family would have broken down—the pun is intentional—any time in the last half century.

Perhaps this is why Priestley as dramatist and we as audience are able instinctively to disregard a whole series of problems on the level of problem pictures in the Royal Academy, plentifully scattered as these are through the text, and get down to the much deeper question, Can humanism be kept alive in Social Democracy, or does mankind for

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the sake of its own deeper needs have to go a step further? It is not the theatre's business to answer such questions though it may well be its business to ask them. This play doesn't answer, but with grave persistency it asks.

Books

Soviet Literature

SOVIET LITERATURE TODAY by
George Reavey. *Lindsay Drummond*, 8s. 6d.

Reviewed by *John Stropp*

DURING THE WAR MR. REAVEY WAS ON the staff of the British Embassy in the U.S.S.R., and so had opportunities of becoming familiar with literary works not yet available in this country. Hence his new volume, an examination of Soviet trends and achievements in literature during the past decade, has a certain interest even for those who, while not agreeing with his views, are prepared in reading the book to disentangle fact from opinion.

In his attitude towards his subject Mr. Reavey is factual but unsympathetic. Though his book has, perhaps inadvertently, provided a text to a Russophobe, Mr. Reavey's lack of enthusiasm for the Soviet literary scene appears to be the outcome rather of incomprehension than of malice. It is hard on a man who has claims to be an authority in such a subject as modern Soviet literature when his knowledge outruns his understanding. Certainly one would be attributing to its author unjustifiably super-subtle motives to assume that this book was written in the hope of damning with faint praise. Nothing comes amiss to the professional inflaters of red bogeys, and in providing some of them with yet another occasion for their reckless parlour-game, Mr. Reavey appears to have been victim rather than accomplice.

To judge the world of Soviet letters as if English values were absolute ones is apt to complicate even a fairly well-intentioned attempt at interpretation. Puzzled as he may be, Mr. Reavey doggedly tabulates his facts. He traces the development of Soviet letters from the thirties, at which time the concept of Socialist Realism was elaborated in criticism and given expression principally in the novel, through the war years, when, with a few secluded exceptions, Russian as English writers were busied employing their talents in the common cause. In the brief post-war period to which he was able to give attention, Mr. Reavey claims to detect a tendency on the part of Soviet critics to repudiate influences from the West, and to reaffirm the Marxist philosophical standpoint which, together with certain traditionally Russian critical views and genres he sees as fundamental to Soviet literary thought. (In this connection it would have been interesting to know whether the baleful Western influence of which the

Russians find it hard to approve is better represented by the school of *Finnegan's Wake* than by the school of *Forever Amber*).

On Mr. Reavey's showing, the Russian writer quite naturally takes into account any didactic effect his work may be expected to have. He is encouraged to familiarise himself with contemporary social and political problems. He is well aware that a radical departure from the generally agreed social standpoint is likely to involve him in bitter criticism from fellow-writers. Small wonder that our own individualistic litterateurs, who neither feel nor seek to acquire a sense of social responsibility, have the sensation when looking at Russia of glimpsing an improbable world where values are reversed.

For example, a writer of integrity is in our eyes one who refrains from trimming his own work to fit the debased requirements of a commercial market. This view is quite meaningless when, as in Russia, the demand for the best literature is unsatisfied even though the classics are reprinted in millions of copies; and when publishing concerns are organised not for profit but to meet a social need. The Soviet preoccupation with the "hero who makes history" is almost incomprehensible to Western readers, whose serious fiction is largely concerned with man as the victim of imponderable social forces.

Such ambiguities of term and purpose place any critic in a quandary. The easy thing is to be insular and provocative; wilfully to misunderstand. Mr. Reavey does not sacrifice critical inquiry to the scoring of political points, but he evidently finds some aspects of Soviet practice so remote from his own experience as to be almost incomprehensible.

To him there is something incongruous in the predominance given to ideological criticism in the U.S.S.R. This is of course in striking contrast to English literary practice, where criticism that rises above the bogey-blowing level is at best a gentlemanly business, of no offence or importance in the world, at the worst a mere extension of publishers' advertising. Mr. Reavey attempts to justify the importance placed by the Soviet Government on the fostering of letters by reference to the strong emphasis in Russian criticism given to literature's socially-educative influence, a tradition descending from Belinsky and Chernichevsky; but he evidently finds it difficult to conceive that a writer might voluntarily frame his work so as to have an enlightening effect, without considering that he had thereby sacrificed part of his integrity.

As a corrective to those who dismiss recent Soviet literature as the hack-work of bureaucratically-manipulated scribblers, Mr. Reavey's first-hand information of how Soviet writers reacted to the war has a special interest. Ehrenbourg turned himself into a journalistic volcano, spouting daily his caustic essays. Marshak wrote scripts for the *Kukrini*. Tikhonov fought through the siege of Leningrad. Simonov, with incredible versatility, wrote everything

from love-poems to scenarios. Meanwhile Sholokhov, Fadayevev and Leonov continued with their long, slowly and carefully-written novels, and except in the case of the last-named produced little of very immediate effect during the period when writers were mobilised. When Ehrenbourg criticised those who did not follow his own propagandist example, the eminent critic, Pertzov replied: "Would it be right, for instance, to hurry Sholokhov, who is working on his novel. *They Fought For Their Country*, when one knows his nature . . . let each do what he can." Though evidently, from the case of Zoschenko, one realises that such tolerance did not extend to those who, from the safety of Central Asia, chose to be captious or carping in their country's moment of peril.

There are always to be found liberty-loving, independent English critics whose attitude towards the literatures of foreign countries marches congenially in step with that of His Majesty's Foreign Office towards their governments. Some of the statements in Mr. Reavey's book will no doubt help them pick a quarrel or two in what they conceive to be their country's cause. Bewilderment has often been unconscious ally to malevolence, and Mr. Reavey has only himself to blame if, unable through some lack of imaginative sympathy satisfactorily to understand and interpret the Soviet viewpoint he finds himself keeping company with those who have purpose and interest in wilfully misunderstanding.

Portrait of an Imperialist

WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY, by Jerome Hamilton Buckley. *Princeton University Press*, 16s.

Reviewed by C. H. Hobday

WHO NOW READS HENLEY? SINCE HE IS known today mainly for the regrettable claptrap of *Invictus* and "England, my England," it is not surprising that few readers are tempted to explore farther. He has other claims to fame—perhaps the best translation from Villon in the language, some interesting experiments in *vers libre* and poetic realism, the plays in which he collaborated with Stevenson, his edition of Burns and the *Tudor Translations*—but his real monument is in the biographies and autobiographies of greater men. He lives, if at all, as the friend of Stevenson, as the patron of Wells, Kipling, Yeats and Conrad, and, as this new biography reminds us, as one of the most vital personalities and strongest influences of his age.

Mr. Buckley, as a dutiful biographer, makes a few half-hearted claims for Henley's verse, while quoting sufficiently to disprove them, but he wisely concentrates on Henley the man and Henley the symptom, the mirror of his age. He therefore calls his book "a study in the 'counter-decadence' of

the 'nineties," and surveys the "activist" tradition in nineteenth-century literature before tracing the personal tragedy of Henley's long and gallant struggle with disease. From that tragedy emerged the moving hospital poems, the raw material of poetry rather than the thing itself, yet the more convincing for their crudity.

Unfortunately the experience had other results. Henley's lameness goaded him to the blatant self-assertion of *Invictus*, to the piratical pose he maintained throughout life (he was the original of Long John Silver), and to the sheer brutality of his poems on the South African War. He himself used the term "Jingo" to define his political position. His Imperialism at times assumed pathological forms, as in *The Song of the Sword*. Because he was unfit he preached the survival of the fittest, with the sword as its instrument,

*Sifting the nations,
The slag from the metal,
The waste and the weak
From the fit and the strong.*

There is nothing unusual in this. The cult of the heroic and the primitive has found many of its prophets in the diseased and the impotent, in Carlyle, Stevenson, Kipling, D. H. Lawrence.

Henley was a typical Imperialist at least in that he never understood the English. When he writes, "Beef, beer, horses, *Moll Flanders* and the Church of England, the King and *The Newgate Calendar*—what is there, what could there be more typically English than all these?" what he presents as a picture of England is a Frenchman's caricature. There is a humour Blake would have relished in linking the Church with a story of prostitution and the monarchy with a chronicle of crime, but we may doubt whether it was intentional.

Henley's deformity made him a professional bookman who pined for a life of action. His envious admiration for all who lived such a life found expression in his scorn alike for the dreary pessimism of the aesthetes and the sentimental philistinism of the middle classes. He was indeed nearer to the aesthetes than he would have cared to admit, in his glorification of style at the expense of substance as in his readiness to shock the bourgeoisie; if fate had doomed him to this sedentary craft, he could at least completely master it. Yet even stylistically his verse is disappointing; it is formless because it is empty. Shaw was not far wrong when he called Henley "a man with an extraordinary and imposing power of saying things, and with nothing to say." That no doubt is why he devoted so much time to the mechanical trivialities of ballades, rondeaux and villanelles, as certain modern poets write sestinas, forms which can stand alone without need of content.

With all his loyalty to his hero, Mr. Buckley is driven at last to lay more stress on Henley's influence than on his personal achievement. Essentially a romantic, he exercised a strong influence in favour of realism, not the pessimistic naturalism of Flaubert and Zola, but the extraverted

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realism of Defoe, Swift, Fielding, Smollett, Burns and Byron. In them he found a heroic attitude to life saner than that of the Imperialists, and the perfect antidote to aestheticism and philistinism alike. His critical wisdom is justified of its child, the romantic realism found in the best of Kipling, in Conrad, and in the early Wells.

Sherry and Old Picnics

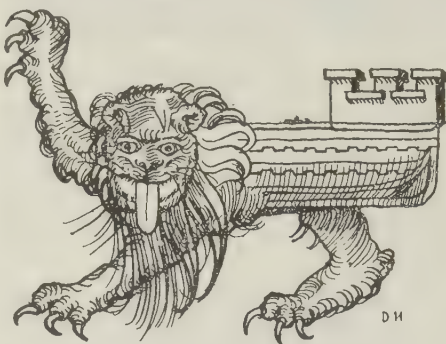
SHERIDAN. Lewis Gibbs. *Dent*, 15s.

Reviewed by *Hugh Sykes Davies*

VISITORS TO BATH ARE FAMILIAR WITH A curious piece of architecture that looks down on the city from one of the neighbouring hills. It is a sizeable façade in the Gothic manner, with turrets and battlements and embrasures. When you get up to it, the sensation of disappointment at finding nothing whatever behind it is mitigated by a certain surprise at the folly that should have conceived such an erection, and you may even find a certain enjoyment in the juxtaposition of the impressive hollowness of the wall, and the litter of old picnics on the grass behind it. The life of Sheridan is capable of exciting very much the same emotions not unnaturally, since it is a product in part of Bath, and of the same period of

taste that produced what is known locally as "The Sham Castle."

Mr. Gibbs is quite honest about the Sham Castle side of Old Sherry's career, and quite rightly does his best to make it as hollowly impressive as may be. But he keeps hinting that after all there is something behind it, some kind of a human being who deserves respect and affection, because he was faith-



ful to Fox, if not to his wives, and because Byron found him still full of fun and games. My own impression is that the hints, though skilfully managed, never really come to anything: that if you walk close up to Mr. Gibbs' Sheridan, you find pretty much the same old litter of picnics that you find behind the other Sham Castle, half-burnt fires of emotions than never had much warmth in them at the best of times, charred relics of bills unpaid, and an astounding number of empty bottles. The effect is much the same as that of a lifelong *déjeuner à l'herbe* with the Hell Fire Club. A good deal of wit, no doubt, until everyone was besotted, some fine talk, and behind it all the bottomless frivolity of an age in which politics had sunk to faction, morality to good manners, and the arts to a gentlemanly hobby.

The best thing about Mr. Gibbs' biography is that he doesn't try to claim for the plays anything excessive, or to present Sheridan as a literary genius. This side of his façade is kept in its true proportion. Most of the book deals with politics and public life, fully and well, but without the disgust which they deserve. But then, if Mr. Gibbs had felt disgust, he would probably not have attempted the biography at all.

The whole thing is smoothly done, and is both more credible and more readable than most of the other biographies of Sheridan. It has only two weaknesses. Firstly, it hardly attempts to catch the atmosphere of the theatre in the late eighteenth century, or to explain why and how such a Façade as Sheridan should have achieved such success in it. Secondly, there is no point in writing books about Sheridan in any case. It is a waste of paper that can ill be spared at the moment, and that could be spent much better in dealing with the lives of other men, even of the same age, less gaudy perhaps, but far more deserving of serious attention. The plain fact is that Sheridan has held the stage for too long. He had little to say, however well he said it. There are bigger characters waiting in the wings.

Stories

THE UNVANQUISHED by Howard Fast. *The Bodley Head*, 8s. 6d.

LONDON GOES TO HEAVEN by Jane Lane. *Dakers*, 10s. 6d.

GEORGIA BOY by Erskine Caldwell. *The Falcon Press*, 6s.

Reviewed by *J. Bristol*

TO MOST OF US, GEORGE WASHINGTON is a profile on a postage stamp. In his fictional account of the New York campaign, *The Unvanquished*, Howard Fast has attempted to rescue Washington's figure from the hands of American ikon-manufacturers. Evidently his intention was to portray Washington as a living man, heading an army of revolutionary levies, who became the father of his nation in the same manner as several contemporary European statesmen—by leadership in an insurrectionary war. That his heroic attempt does not succeed is an index of the difficulties confronting those novelists who make more than a conventional obeisance in the direction of historical truth.

In the historical novel, to distort or simplify events is to undermine the psychological probability of characters playing chief part in them. By vamping up certain facts and playing down others, Mr. Fast enhances the dramatic effect of his narrative, but the figure of Washington is not thereby increased in stature. In order that a rather specious parallel may be drawn between Howe's Hessian mercenaries and the Nazi troops, the British Army is flatteringly portrayed as being much more fearsome and efficient than one had ever imagined. The reader is allowed to infer that Washington was created Commander-in-Chief rather for his fox-hunting prowess than on account of his previous military experience in the French wars. Washington's policy of preserving his army by continual retreat, coupled with small local victories to maintain morale, is shown as the outcome rather of intuition than of sagacity.

Mr. Fast's Washington drinks and swears just like the old man himself, but his profanity is a shade too conscientious, and when he cracks a bottle one feels that he does so because a competent stage-manager in the wings has just handed him one. He is portrayed, unhistorically, as a sexless creature, perhaps to point a contrast with his antagonist General Howe and his rival General Lee. In addition to these stage-trappings, Washington's character is further defined by instalments of psychological analysis. He wears two masks: one, that of the stage hero saying the historically avouched lines at the correct times and places, and another in his further rôle as the tortured individual, morbidly afraid of fear and secretly longing for all his men to love him. This psychological approach, while seeming to augment the reality of the man, in fact tends to deny the rôle of consciousness in his nature, and so diminishes him. The Washington who emerges is not the

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calm yet passionate figure, concentrating in his individuality so many aspects of the American revolution, whose true personality one glimpses even through the orthodox portraits of those who by their very eulogies traduce. Rather he is a stiff, cranky, self-questioning egotist, motivated not by reason so much as by a personal mystique. It is a measure of Mr. Fast's shortcoming (for one may be sure he had not the intention) that he has produced a portrait of Washington which makes him appear like nothing so much as an eighteenth-century de Gaulle.

Miss Jane Lane, in *London Goes to Heaven*, has transported Lord Beaverbrook's "Little Man" to the City of London during the Commonwealth. An honest, loyal inn-keeper, Master Guffin begins by being shocked at the execution of Charles I. The way in which, subsequently, all manner of fanatics interfere with his daily life stirs up his resentment. His workpeople become presumptuous and his children involve themselves in political conspiracy. He is taxed, fined and bedevilled. Finally, Merrie England returns with Charles II, and Mr. Guffin's tight, stratified, sycophantic little world comes to rights once more. Miss Lane exhibits the same bewilderment and distaste at the history of the Commonwealth as do loyal Conservatives at the measures and policies of the present administration. She has documented her novel with enormous care, and can answer any question about the Revolution except the single vital one—what impelled ordinary people of the time to become revolutionaries? A stable-mate of those tendentious plays about nationalisation which recently graced the London stage, its success with a suburban audience is assured irrespective of the accuracy of Miss Lane's scholarship or the fervour of her royalism.

In *Georgia Boy*, Erskine Caldwell has collected some sketches of his life as a child among the Southern poor whites. They have the smooth manufactured texture of the American magazine story, and make corresponding concessions to popular sentimentality. A stupid, poetic darkie works as labourer for a feckless, romantic Pa. Ma larrups Pa whenever he strays from virtue. Uncle Ned escapes from the chain gang, and even a chain gang, one feels, is a sad wistful joke.

Perhaps it was another writer of the same name who a dozen years ago wrote *Kneel to the Rising Sun*.

Chinese Poetry

CONTEMPORARY CHINESE POETRY
Edited with an introduction by Robert Payne. Routledge, 10s. 6d.

Reviewed by *Arthur Waley*

THIS VOLUME CONTAINS OVER A HUNDRED poems by nine poets. The translations are in some cases by the poets themselves; in other cases the poets have checked the translations of their poems made by other Chinese. The method has, in general,

worked very well. It seems occasionally to slip up over conjunctions, which in Chinese are often not expressed.

Thus on p. 31 I should have thought

*The tide ebbs, but she will not send
The piece of the broken ship into the sea*
ought to be:

*The tide is on the ebb, so the best she
can do now is to send . . .*



On p. 87

*Grown up, though toil in the city left
him no void,
he purchased a . . . watch*
is in the original
*He grew up, worked hard in the city
Bought a . . . watch.*

I don't understand either the "though" or the need for the ugly periphrases "toil . . . left him no void." There may have been some misreadings of the poets' handwritings. Comparison with the original shows that the incomprehensible "ratlines" (p. 49, l. 9) can only be a mistake for "outlines." This may also be the case on page 14, where "desolate braid" should of course read "desolate brain"; but this may be a mere misprint.

The poems fall into two groups. Those written by foreign-language students for other foreign-language students and those written by Chinese educated poets for average readers. Hsü Chihmo, whom some readers of this review may have known, for he paid two visits to England, stands in a class rather apart, having been influenced chiefly by English poetry of the Romantic period, whereas the main influences on the work of Pien Chih-lin and the other poets of the first group were T. S. Eliot and Rilke. Mr. Payne complains of Hsü's "terrible sentimentality," judging him no doubt by such a verse as (p. 40).

*If I were the snow
Fluttering to and fro
I must know where to go
Flying, flying, flying,
Where shall I go?*

Hsü was indeed a poet of facile emotions. He reminds me sometimes of Humbert Wolfe: but (like Wolfe) he was a dexterous technician, and this translation with its functionless internal rhyme in the third line, does him great injustice.

Pien Chih-lin, the most interesting poet in the first group, writes difficult poems, and then describes in very lucid prose-notes the process by which he has made the poems so difficult. The twelve lines of *Late on a*

Festival Night (p. 87) are explained in fifty lines of prose (p. 93), a procedure which might have been pedantic and annoying, but which turns out to be highly advantageous to the reader. The translation is marred by the line "a pity that I can't hear with you my sleeping breath." The original says "a pity I can't be by you, to hear myself snoring." Is "sleeping breath" pidgin, or Basic English, or both? Pien Chih-lin, in a note about another of his poems, not included in this book, speaks of writing "on the borderline between the intelligible and the unintelligible." Here (p. 90) is a very beautiful poem (*The Peninsular*) which seems to me to be well on the intelligible side of the line:

*The peninsular is a slender finger
Pointing to the three fairy sea-hills
The small white house is already
surrounded on three sides
With water sweet to the eye, but not to the tongue.
A fountain has then risen in the courtyard:
And lines of footprints have been
traced towards a door,
The beckoning diamond you yearned
for last night
Is today the very place that shelters you.
Oh gather up the waves in window
curtains
Lest the guest ponder now those im-
patient sails.*

The meaning of the last line is literally: "lest the visitor should again gaze into the distance at departing sails." I don't like

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the jingle of "lest" and "guest," or see the point of "ponder."

About the three "people's poets," Tseng Ko-chia, Ai Ching and Tien Chien, I can't say much, as I do not know their work in the original. I should guess that their poems are song-words and cannot be judged from the printed page. The very short lines, (sometimes consisting of only one syllable) do not give a sufficient rhythmic shade in English.

Mr. Payne lays no claim to have had any part in making the translations, but I can't help suspecting that he did rather more than he says, and that the skillful phrasing and fine sense of quantity displayed in much of the book are due partly to his revision. As an editor he is a bit slap-dash. One should not misspell Mr. E. M. Forster, write Chienchow for Changchow, and so on. A little more annotation would have been a help. One loses the whole point of *Autumn Beauty*, (p. 49), by Wen I-tuo, if one is not told that it was written in a public park in Chicago.

Sickert

A FREE HOUSE; OR THE ARTIST AS CRAFTSMAN. Being the writings of Walter Richard Sickert. Edited by Osbert Sitwell. Macmillan, 25s.

Reviewed by *William Coldstream*

IN THE ESSAY WITH WHICH SIR OSBERT Sitwell prefaces Sickert's collected writings, it is with Sickert as a talker, rather than as a writer or painter that he is chiefly concerned. Sir Osbert is, to use his own words "a watcher of human beings, especially artists." He knew Sickert well for many years and this preliminary essay, filled with first-hand information most skilfully presented, could scarcely be more readable.

Through the nature of the preface and possibly the editing of the writings, the reader's attention is directed in this book to Sickert as a character rather than to what Sickert has to say about painting; and it is for its revelation of character, its funny stories (the one at the top of page XLIII of Sir Osbert's essay is worth 25/- in itself), and for the picture it gives of a past period that the book is most likely to be bought and read. But apart from this high entertainment value, Sickert's writings are important not only for the light they throw on his own work, but also because they are the writings of an artist of mature achievement who was in the main tradition of European painting, understood it, and knew how to write not only brilliantly but clearly.

The material for this book is taken, for the greater part, from articles contributed mostly between the dates of 1910, (when Sickert was 50) and 1925, to such papers as *The New Age*, *The Art News*, and *The Burlington Magazine*. The editor has arranged the articles according to subject rather than in chronological order. This method has the advantage of making the book more attractive to the average reader. It has

the disadvantage of emphasising Sickert's apparent inconsistency (and his inconsistency is much more apparent than real), making it less easy for us to follow the steady development of his thought and opinions. It would be interesting to know what, and how much, has been left out.

"I am a pupil of Whistler," Sickert writes, "that is to say, at one remove of Courbet and at two removes of Corot." He was also, he tells us, in close touch with Degas over a period of 30 years, went often to his studio, and watched the master at work.

Degas had learned from Ingres, and his methods in painting could probably be traced back to Poussin and further. He had inherited and was able to carry forward the main tradition of European painting.

References to Degas, affection for him as a man and the highest admiration for his work, recur frequently in Sickert's writings. The introduction to Degas had been through Sickert's first master, Whistler. But Whistler, Sickert was to come to believe, had not been a master in the full sense of the word, not in painting anyway; though Sickert always retained a great regard for some of Whistler's pictures and for much of his drawing and etching. But Sickert was critical of Whistler's hit-or-miss methods and through the teaching of Degas came to believe that pictures should be "brought about by conscious stages, each so planned as to form a progression to a foreseen end." To master the process of painting in this sound and reasonable way became for Sickert an ideal.

To what extent Sickert succeeded in realising the ideal must be a matter of opinion, but even those who see his achievement in his drawings rather than in his paintings will probably agree that the quality of the drawings is due to the fact that they are working drawings, intended to be used in the making of complete pictures, not drawings done simply for exhibition. Sickert was not by nature a facile draughtsman. He touches on his lack of ability to draw out of his head. But the draughtsman without facility has one great advantage, he can take nothing for granted. He must explore the field of his vision step by step and in so doing puts himself in the way to make original discoveries. Sickert taught himself to draw, probably with a great deal of conscious effort, and for this reason what he has to say about drawing and learning to draw is of special importance.

Of the many passages in this book of acute interest, especially to the practising artist, the following stands out perhaps, as typical of Sickert's point of view, and bearing the marks of the tradition in which he worked: "Deformation or distortion is a necessary quality in hand-made art. Not only is this deformation or distortion not a defect. It is one of the sources of pleasure and interest. But it is so on one condition: that it result from the effort for accuracy of an accomplished hand, and the inevitable degree of human error in the result."

There is a large number of students of drawing and painting to which the publication of this book will be an event of no little importance.

Inside the New Yugoslavia

PARTISAN PICTURE by Basil Davidson. Bedford Books, 18s.

THE WATERSHED by Arthur Calder-Marshall. Contact Publications, 8s. 6d.

Reviewed by *James Klugmann*

Partisan Picture IS AN IMPORTANT BOOK. It is important because it gives a true and accurate picture of the birth of the new Yugoslavia, because, more than any other book published in England since the war, it provides a key to understanding the new social forces in Europe, and moreover because it is strongly felt, excellently written and vividly presented.

Lt.-Col. Davidson was a journalist before the war and travelled considerably in the Balkans. During the war he became head of the Department in G.H.Q., Middle Eastern Forces responsible for liaison with and help to the resistance forces in Yugoslavia. He was amongst the first British officers to parachute to Marshal Tito's headquarters, and was the first to move thence to the Fruska Gora, that small hilly forest area between the Sava and Danube rivers which was a centre of resistance to the enemy throughout the war. His mission took him across the Danube to live secretly with the underground Partisan movement in the flat Backa plain occupied by Hungarian troops. His work was more dangerous and difficult than that of most of the British Liaison Officers in Greece and Yugoslavia, but he tells his story modestly, concentrating the attention of the readers not on his own activities, but on the life, efforts and struggles of the Partisans.

The book gives a real insight into the death of the old and the birth of the new Yugoslavia. It explains the collapse of the old rulers of that country, the treachery of Mihailovic, the almost incredible courage, far-sightedness and endurance with which the Partisan leaders built up, out of the first ragged groups of unarmed guerrillas in the hills, a disciplined, well-organised resistance army of some 800,000 men. The book is not a dry text-book, but combines a straight account of his own experience with the Partisan forces in the Vojvodina with a general picture of the development of the National Liberation Movement.

Perhaps there is for the normal reader a little too much detail on the military organisation and battle order of the resistance movement, but on the whole Davidson has succeeded admirably in welding together his own direct and personal experiences with the general story of the Partisan movement. The workers, peasants, and intellectuals who formed the movement are presented as they were, with their faults and their achievements, difficulties and triumphs. The book makes it possible to understand how these people in transforming their country transformed themselves, won a new confidence and self-reliance, and how it is, that out of the villages and fac-

tories the new leaders and administrators of Yugoslavia have arisen.

Arthur Calder-Marshall witnessed the same movement at a different time and in different circumstances. At the El Shatt camp on the Suez canal in Egypt, he saw the thirty thousand Yugoslav refugees from the Dalmatian coast. Later, when the war was ended, he visited Belgrade and Bosnia, and was able to see the same people in the process of rebuilding their devastated country. He did not have the same possibilities as Davidson of living in close daily contact with the Yugoslav people, nor has he the same intimate knowledge of their history and language. Davidson spoke fluent Serbo-Croat, whilst Calder-Marshall had to work through an interpreter, and, unfortunately, it is sometimes the interpreter rather than the Yugoslav people that is shown to the reader. All the same, *The Watershed* is a well-written, interesting and useful book.

Perhaps most valuable is the chapter on Belgrade. It describes vividly the Yugoslav "opposition," those people who, when the last Germans were driven across the Yugoslav border into Austria, quickly descended to the basement to store away their German flags and to bring out the Union Jacks and the Stars and Stripes. These people have become the most fanatic Anglo-phils and lovers of America, and anxiously await the third world war which they hope will restore to them their erstwhile power and prestige.

It is these people whom British Government representatives in Yugoslavia seem to prefer to listen to. That is how such a distorted picture of the new Yugoslavia comes to be presented to the public by official spokesmen and the Press.

Radio

Ignorance is Bliss—Yes? by Victoria Rootes

MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN ABOUT THE power of the radio as an influence upon national life; and at least it is clear that its power to influence is more uninterrupted than, say, the medium of films. Much has also been written about its responsibilities as a centre of information and education; and it is equally clear that large numbers of people have learned to rely on the radio as their sole source of supply for these commodities. The purpose of this column is to take up each month some aspect of broadcasting as general as these and deal with it in relation to the radio material at present available to the listeners in this country.

The trouble is deciding where to start, for there are immediately so many subjects which demand attention: the organisation and interrelations of the three services; the function of radio—is it indeed functional or is it merely there to fill the house with noise?; the religious and political bias which shows through the work of some

departments; the proper use of radio as a special art form; the feeling one sometimes has that the B.B.C. thinks of its audience as being wholly middle-class; and other matters too, more obviously on the credit side. For reasons which are hard to explain but which make me think the matter of current importance, I plump this month for the B.B.C.'s apparent assumption—particularly noticeable on the Light Programme—that, whether Ignorance be Bliss or no, ignorant is what the listener is.

It begins in the morning with *Lift Up Your Hearts* and, on two days a week, the other two religious programmes. On all these there is now a noticeable tendency to tell the listeners how to conduct themselves during the day—in their unions, at school, while shopping and the rest—an attitude which, coming from parsons or professional zealots of another kind, is not only insulting to the professional unionist, schoolboy (if he cares) and shopper but betrays an almost incredible assumption of authority. Its most obvious parallel elsewhere in the corporation is the Talks Department's habit of providing "experts" on subjects which have known and generally admitted experts of their own. The same attitude is present in much of the housewife help-hints material (a place where, possibly rightly, the assumption of a middle-class audience is also very marked), much of which is concerned with information which might safely be assumed already known and the presentation of which is sometimes nasty in its condescension. By and large, none of this matters very much. The people who might be offended switch the darn thing off. But *Lift Up Your Hearts* is an insidious exception: one leaves it on because it immediately precedes the news or to check one's watch by the pips. It does matter, though, if taken as a sign of a general attitude.

By far the most marked occasion on which ignorance is assumed either desirable or existent is in the Quiz programmes. The general design of these is one thing: the audience participation, the fact that the questions come in from listeners and much else makes them even a good thing. The badness lies in the announcer's attitude which plays for cheap laughs (i.e., Participant: "I have chosen serious music." Announcer: "O dear me, I shall have to watch my p's and q's." Audience: Laughter. Announcer: "Now, can you tell me who wrote the Clock Symphony?" and, in the same breath, "Now, audience, no helping please. No helping yet.")

An indication that the audience really is more serious than the B.B.C. was supplied by the recent debating programme, *It's My Opinion*, where the participants and the audience seemed constantly to be attempting serious discussion (on marriage, on work and home) while the announcer seemed constantly attempting a return to the frivolous (would you marry a bald man? do you like short skirts?).

The thing crops up again in the Drama Department—though here one cannot separate it from the suspicion that the B.B.C. is addressing the middle-class: indeed, one cannot really separate any one subject out of the whole business of whether the B.B.C.

is fulfilling the demands made upon it. A large percentage of radio Drama consists of adaptations of West End plays. West End plays are (I take this as proven) presented for middle-class audiences by people who believe the middle-class to be uninterested in serious Drama. This last assumption may or may not be true; the real point is that the B.B.C. audience is already a vastly larger one. Yet where the West End does throw up a serious play, or a play with less limited appeal, it gets no preference from the Drama Department. And here, I think, one finds a clue to the apparently silly concentration of so many programmes upon superficials, upon an adulation of ignorance and a discouragement to thought, upon the supreme importance of entertainment. For in the choice of plays for broadcasting one finds consistently the belief that the listener should not be asked to think.

The crux of the matter is whether the radio has a more important function than to entertain, whether it ought to encourage people to go out and be social beings or whether it should try to keep them at home for the sake of fifteen minutes on their pet subject and an hour's laughter, whether it is to drug or to stimulate.

One feels that the present tendency to advise against thought is part and parcel of a more general attitude that the function of radio is an essentially non-serious one. Two things make this particularly apparent. The first is the lack of any co-ordination between the three programmes—especially visible recently in the Third's series of Shakespeare Histories being paralleled with a Television *Romeo and Juliet* and a Home *Macbeth*—but always visible because of the policy of letting the programmes compete against each other. The second results from this, and is the lack of any organisation within either the Light or Home programmes. The Third does go in for methodically presented sequences—like the Shakespeare Histories, or its various and excellent presentations of English Music—but in the other two, the only piece of methodical planning is the huge dose of Sport Coverage on Saturday afternoons. Surely if Sport is worth it, other subjects are. This is not to inveigh against the actual productions on these programmes, many of which are unexceptionably excellent—particularly the standard of symphonic music and the more documentary-type feature. But it is to inveigh against a system (or the lack of it) which allows for no continuity through, say, an evening's listening or, worse still, for the simultaneous transmission by one corporation of two items which have an equal appeal to an identical audience. What is wanted is a *real* choice, and not the present aggravation—a choice between a symphony and a talk, between entertainment and education.

If this were admitted, it would be because the B.B.C. had assumed interest and intelligence on the part of its listeners. If interest and intelligence were admitted, it would lead to a more functional attitude to the individual programmes themselves. And if programmes were functional, we should get less of the redundant information and the gratuitous insult.

Post

A Very Blue Pencil

THE REVIEW OF "OPEN CITY" IN YOUR August number does not mention that the original film contains some scenes which have been cut in the English version. These cuts are to my mind motivated by reasons other than mere economy in time. They deprive the audience of some facts important for a full appreciation of the film. I will describe two of them and let your readers judge of their own significance.

First, from the cross-examination of the captured underground leader by the Gestapo officer the fact emerges that he is a Communist, and that he fought for "the reds" in Spain.

It may seem to some that this information is of little importance for the meaning of the film. I would point out that it is of the utmost significance, for just before the cross-examination, whilst the Communist and his Catholic fellow-prisoner are waiting in their cell, the former begins to make an avowal of his political faith ("We may not have a chance to talk again. You must know that I am not what you think I am . . .") which is interrupted and which he is significantly drunken expatriate in Mexico, onetime an Gestapo officer are we informed of the facts. As a result, the contrast between Catholic priest and Communist partisan is sharpened, and the loyalty of the former for his "atheist" friend, stands out greater than before.

London filmgoers however, are not allowed to know all this.

Secondly, the scene in the torture-cell is far more prolonged in the original. The horrors of torture alternate with glimpses of the comfort in the German Officers' Mess and the haunting melody of the piano. At the height of this sequence the Gestapo officer emerging from the Mess enters the cell. His victim is unconscious, his head slumped forward. The officer has him revived by an intravenous injection and then, visibly moved, bends over the mutilated face and says: (I quote from memory) "I admire your courage. You have suffered immensely. You are a Communist—do you think that the Monarchist officers of Badoglio who are advancing with the armies of what you choose to call . . . er . . . liberation—do you think that they would suffer as much for you?"

To this profoundly cunning political temptation the victim replies by spitting in the Nazi's face.

In the English film we see this last action but are not told the words which preceded it.

I suggest that it was a very blue pencil that vetted *Open City* for British audiences. In view of the great merit of this prize-winning film (in my opinion the finest artistic product of the war), I strongly object to any tampering with Rossellini's original.

O. Hollander.

Shorter Notices

Books

THE MUSEUM OF CHEATS by Sylvia Townsend Warner. Chatto and Windus 8s. 6d.

THE COUNTRYSIDE OF SOUTHERN ENGLAND has become a place of refuge for numberless decayed gentry, retired colonial, aged daughters of the clergy, and liveries on independent means in search of the cheap and simple life. These types provide Sylvia Townsend Warner with subjects for her stories. Socially they are the lineal descendants of Jane Austen's people, and accordingly Miss Townsend Warner portrays them on Jane's inch of ivory. Country society, once organised systematically around the big house, now vegetates in remodelled cottages and brick bungalows. The lives of their inhabitants are normally so fantastic that when Miss Townsend Warner's lucid vision trembles and collapses into fantasy, one is never quite sure if it is because things really happen like that, or whether the transformation scene is intended to mitigate an unbearable reality. In either event, these stories are fantastically well written.

UNDER THE VOLCANO by Malcolm Lowry. Cape, 9s. 6d.

An examination of the reasons why a drunken expatriate in Mexico, onetime ornament of the diplomatic corps and now a deserted and neglected toper, got into his pretty pass. Time: the years before September 1939. Any number of heroic illusions about society and human conduct are turned inside out. The scenes of drunkenness are so brilliantly written that it is a pity they serve to remind one of nothing but *The Long Week-End*.

THE HILLS REMAIN by Nicholas Powell. The Bodley Head, 7s. 6d.

A short novel of life during the war in a town of the Abruzzi, describing the love affair of a sad and bewildered young conscript with a girl of light virtue. She, after playing fast and loose with his feelings, finally becomes convinced of the solid advantages of marriage. The war enters only incidentally, as a backcloth of painted storm-clouds. Since Mr. Powell evidently had first-hand experience of civilian wartime Italy, it seems a pity that he confined himself to so trivial a theme. He is too realistic for those who like sugar-icing on their romance, and not serious enough for those who can draw nourishment from stern reality.

ENVY by Y. Olesha,

THE UNKNOWN ARTIST by V. Kaverin, Westhouse, 9s. 6d.

Rightwing American publicists are busy just now, paging through twenty-year-old speeches by Stalin in order to find quotations proving the inevitability, or even the desirability, of war with Russia. From his

exile in California, Gleb Struve speeds the good work. In his preface to these minor Soviet novels of twenty years ago he adduces their neglect by the Soviet reading public as proof of social crimes of which literary dictatorship is the least. Reading the novels serves to confirm a suspicion that Olesha was a retarded adolescent, who in his writing had but one theme, which he repeated, with infinite talent, until the record had worn out. Kaverin is incoherent and attitudinising—a lightweight if there ever was one. Mr. Struve, who evidently does not expect us to take his unsupported word for proof of his sensational assertions, must find somewhat better evidence than this if he is to earn his keep.

J. B.

Theatre

MERCURY: Happy as Larry, by Donagh MacDonagh.

Donagh MacDonagh's play had the sort of reception which suggests Martin Browne's campaign for the verse play is bearing fruit. *Happy as Larry* has very lively near-dramatic verse. It doesn't aim high, avoids emotion and is content with tuppence coloured fun. Its high spot—and a very good one—is a description of a police raid on a Dublin pub where old customers could drink after closing time. MacDonagh has made a pretty patchwork of ballad rhythms and by their help gains a forcefulness that gets past the "artiness" present I guess in the conception as well as the production. Liam Redmond and Fred Johnson give happy performances, Michael Warre designed an art setting.

Stratford in Town.

The Stratford productions have been dealt with as they occurred. Welcome to the company in its London season at His Majesty's. What their presence here shows us is that the new Stratford policy has made its point. Stratford is an essential part of any national theatre plan.

M. S.

Records

Reviewed by Thomas Sharp

DECCA K1507-13. BEETHOVEN: *Symphony No. 3 (Eroica)*.

THIS RELEASE HAS A SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE, following, as it does, the cycle of Beethoven symphonies which Victor de Sabata conducted this Spring in London with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. He had led us to accept his mastery of the detail of orchestral playing, and of his highly dramatic, even theatrical interpretations of a wide range of music; but we were a little doubtful about his approach to Beethoven. These records give the answer, and the justification. His sober attitude is shown at once by the deliberate, contemplative pace of the first movement, and the carefully-

balanced speeds of the movements which follow. The playing is well up to the standard he sets, and the recording would have been perfect, had a little more attention been given to the inner parts, which are sometimes given less importance than they deserve.

COLUMBIA LX1006-8. MOZART: Symphony No. 33 in B flat.

After overcoming surprise in finding that the conductor, Herbert von Karajan, whose association with the Nazis is said to have been extended to membership of the Party, has been able to make gramophone records for export, one can take this opportunity of assessing the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra as it now is. It is not safe to rely too much on recording, but the strings still seem characterised by the same richness of tone as of old, while other sections of the orchestra are not quite of equal quality. This symphony is not one of Mozart's most subtle, but is welcome for its unfamiliarity.

COLUMBIA DX1381. DEBUSSY: Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un Faune.

This *Prélude* is one of the few perfect things created by a human being; as with the finest works of Mozart, one cannot imagine a note being added or taken away without some loss to the music. To re-create

it from the score faces the conductor with the impossible, for, after having heard it on innumerable occasions, I still wait for the performance which does complete justice to Debussy's conception. Perhaps one day the conductor will come who realises that bar-lines, dynamic indications, even the scoring, are but approximate guides to the music itself. This is just sound, and, however carefully ordered it may be, and undoubtedly is, the listener must have no hint that the conductor is beating time, or that the players are counting their bars' rest. It must sound like an improvisation; only thus will the composer's impressions reach the listener. Alceo Galliera fails; with the Philharmonia Orchestra, to persuade me that this is the beauty of the afternoon, as vague as the movement of the warm air over the grass. It is all too direct and matter-of-fact, and, although individual instrumentalists play very well, the blend of colour, essential above all in this music, is never obtained. We must wait for another version of this work.



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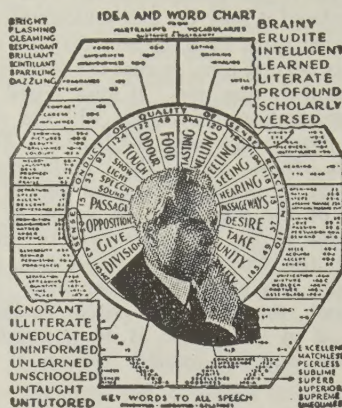
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